June 1979

Guy Davenport & Roy R. Behrens: "Christ Preaching at the Henley Regatta"

★ THE NORTH AMERICAN ★

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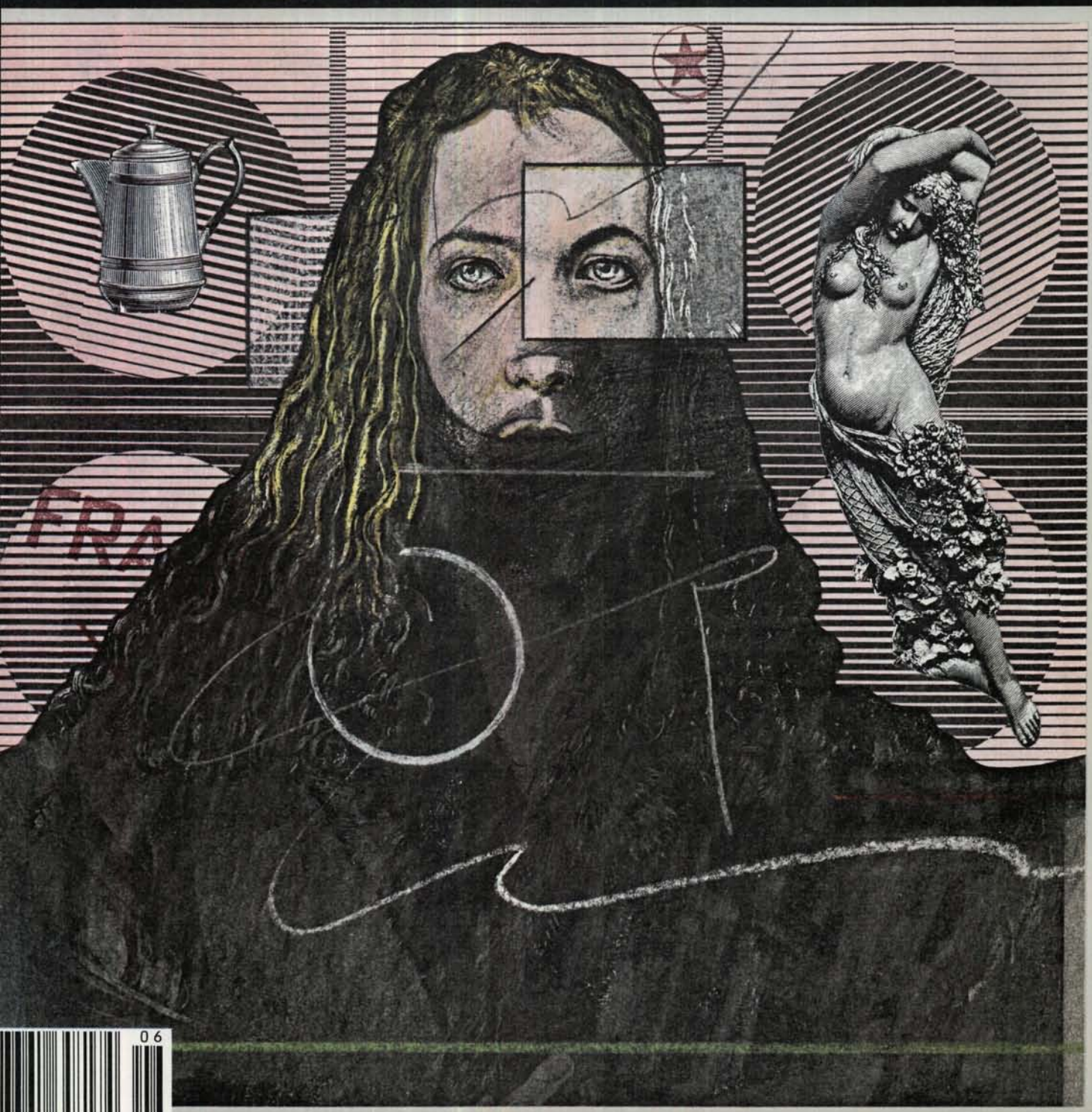

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Wild Should Wild Remain.

"Man always kills the thing he loves, and so we the pioneers have killed our wilderness. Some say we had to. Be that as it may, I am glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in."

ALDO LEOPOLD

"Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe. Love that, not man apart from that...."

ROBINSON JEFFERS

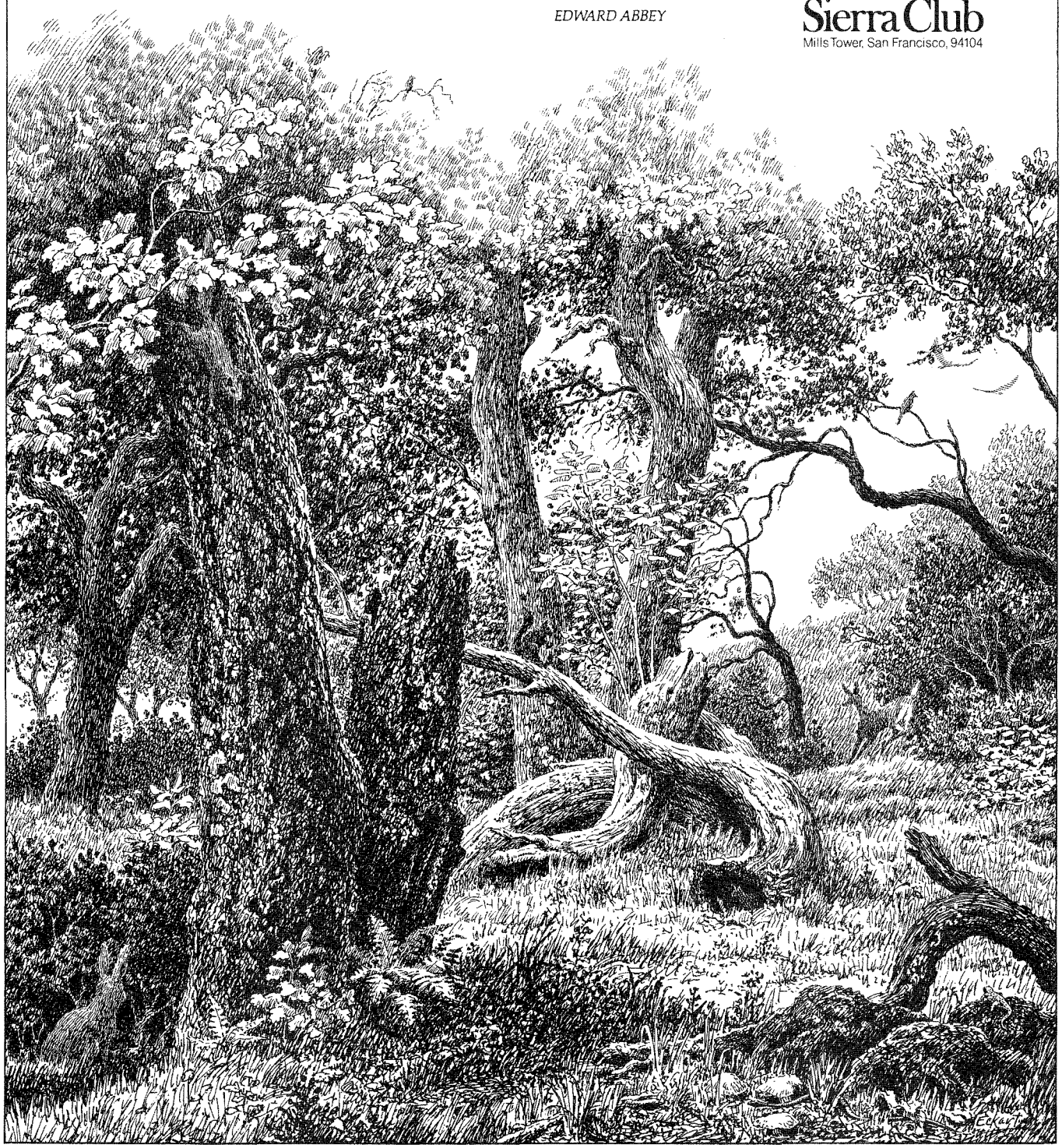
"The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, (the earth which bore us and sustains us), the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need—if only we had the eyes to see."

EDWARD ABBEY

"We need wilderness preserved—as much of it as is still left, and as many kinds... It is important to us... simply because it is there—important, that is, simply as an idea."

WALLACE STEGNER

Sierra Club
Mills Tower, San Francisco, 94104



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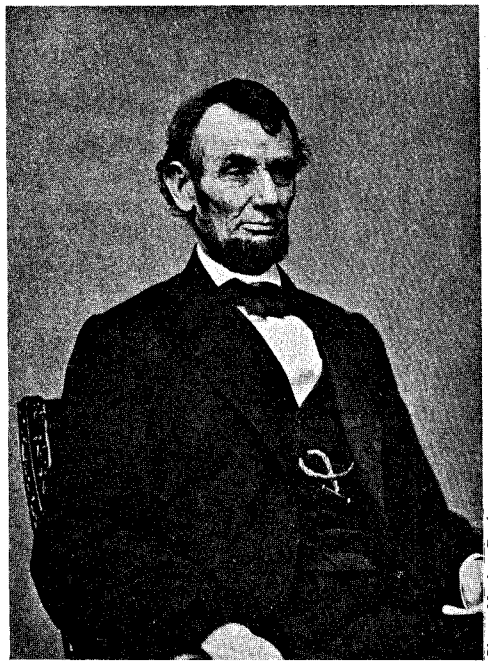

Photo: Matthew Brady

What sort of man reads the North American Review?

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The publishers of the North American Review have had the honor of receiving the following letter from the President of the United States.

"Executive Mansion,
Washington, January 16, 1864.

"Messrs. Crosby and Nichols:–

"Gentlemen: The number for this month and year of the North American Review was duly received, and for which please accept my thanks. Of course I am not the most impartial judge; yet, with due allowance for this, I venture to hope that the article entitled 'The President's Policy' will be of value to the country. I fear I am not quite worthy of all which is therein kindly said of me personally.

"The sentence of twelve lines, commencing at the top of page 252, I could wish to be not exactly as it is. In what is there expressed, the writer has not correctly understood me. I have never had a theory that Secession could absolve States or people from their obligations. Precisely the contrary is asserted in the Inaugural Address; and it was because of my belief in the continuation of these obligations, that I was puzzled, for a time, as to denying the legal rights of those citizens who remained individually innocent of treason or rebellion. But I mean no more now than to merely call attention to this point.

"Yours respectfully,

"A. Lincoln."

[Nothing could have been further from the intention of the Editors than to misrepresent the opinions of the President. They merely meant that, in their judgment, the policy of the Administration was at first such as practically to concede to any rebel who might choose to profess loyalty, rights under the Constitution whose corresponding obligations he repudiated.]

From *The North American Review*, April 1864

Since 1815, no magazine in America has had a readership more distinguished or a literary history more rich than THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW. Now available at newsstands, as well as by subscription.

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WILLIAM D. BERRY
1926—1979

We first heard of Bill Berry in 1974, his talent and imagination brought to our attention in the spring of that year (o happy time!) by the NAR's Environment Editor. That fall Bill provided us with a four-color cover (a bear framed in a bower of blueberries) and eight black-and-white pages of Alaskan wildlife, a sampling of 15 years of sketches from life and memory. In 1975 he gave us two of his happiest creations: the solemn moose named McGonnegal and the lively young woman, Melissa, who teaches him ballet. (Bill always insisted the dance steps he pictured were set to Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty"—and we always believed him.) Melissa and McGonnegal danced from that winter's NAR onto a poster which remains our most peculiar and rewarding accessory venture, and for the last few years we have borrowed many of Bill's drawings to advertise ourselves in other magazines across North America.

Bill Berry's wildlife illustrations—serious or frivolous—were as fine as any we have ever seen, and except for that inexplicable madness which sometimes poisons the society of human animals he would have gone on with them, working with his wife, Liz, in the studio outside Fairbanks. Instead, in mid-May of this year he was shot to death while attempting to make peace in a quarrel that was not his. In that senseless instant the natural world turned less real, less rich.

We looked forward to printing more of Bill's work, but we were slow to ask and timid to impose on his time. Now he is gone; now we are dismayed to publish our sorrow and our loss.

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LETTERS

Three Mile Island and Other Dismays

The antinuclear movement, already thriving as an amalgam of the intellectually concerned and the idealistic young, who can scarcely find any other cause available that is both so tangible and satisfyingly anti-government and anti-Establishment, doubtless will now gain new recruits, especially from people who live near the 39 proposed sites for plants across the U.S.

–"Nuclear Nightmare" (cover story on the Three Mile Island accident), Time, *April 9, 1979.*

To the Editor:

In the United States there are at present sixty-six nuclear power plants in commercial operation. According to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, every plant in operation in 1978 had at least one unscheduled shutdown. In 1977 there were 892 unscheduled shutdowns. The plants' overall performance record is not excellent. In 1978 United States nuclear plants ran at about 67% of capacity. One critic has pointed out that their average was about two days operation out of three.

Seven years ago in the pages of the NAR I described in part the vast informational chaos that surrounds the whole subject of nuclear electric power plants and safety of operation. ("Which Side Am I Supposed to be On?", Spring 1972.) Before writing that article, I spent some time during a cold winter in Minneapolis talking to all sorts of people about real and imaginary dangers to life from Northern States Power Company's nuclear generating operation located north and west of Minneapolis on the Mississippi River at Monticello. I tried diligently to find out how much, if any, danger really threatens cities with nuclear generating operations located nearby. How do we assess the risks? I asked. I considered myself an objective investigator. I owned no stock in NSP. I was never particularly active as an environmentalist. I enjoyed using electric power but I didn't think I was addicted to it. Surely, I though in great naïveté, sincerity and diligence will lead to clear answers.

So I talked to people. I talked to public relations men, environmentalists, scientists, professors, attorneys, editors, students, librarians, utility executives, ministers—everyone I could find who had something to say about nuclear power and its importance and its safety or its danger. I also read a great deal. I read well over thirty pounds of documents supplied by friends and foes of Monticello. Many of the documents originated with the Atomic Energy Commission. I thought a great deal about all of the words I heard and saw. And, finally, I realized that I was no closer to an informed answer to the question than I was when I started my inquiry. Everyone I talked to seemed to have a strong opinion about the safety or danger of nuclear power, but the opinions tended to cancel each other out. Authority contradicted authority. Passionate opposition met grim advocacy. The best scientists were at odds with one another; zealous people were on every side of the question.

I wrote, "At this point it all seems to depend on who you talk to, who you choose to believe. . . ." This conclusion was not the classic indecision of the intellectual who sees too many possibilities to allow decision. Rather, it was—or so I think—a hard-headed appraisal of questions so faceted with conflicting interests, specialties, hopes, fears, ignorance, and sometimes even dishonesty, that no real answers exist. It seems to me now that the question of what safety means in a nuclear operation, how safe must safe be when we deal with human lives and radiation, is no nearer a convincing answer—even after the events at Three Mile Island—than it was seven years ago.

Everything about this issue now seems gilded in sly words, hype, fear, ignorance, evasion, hysteria. It is as if there is so much money at stake, so much need for power, so much fear, there is no place for wisdom. Maybe it is too late for wisdom. This week's *Time* has a cover story on Three Mile Island. The story includes the sly and tortured sentence I placed at the beginning of these remarks. (Coupling "intellectually concerned" with "idealistic young" is a scarcely decent variation on eighteenth century put-down techniques.) On the front page of my morning newspaper is a photograph, four columns by a full twelve inches, of a San Francisco man waving an American flag with one hand and a nuclear protest sign with the other. I hear that protesters against a new nuclear plant are marching in Bloomington, Indiana, chanting, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to radiate." While this goes on, a defender of the nuclear business writes, ". . . now that the reactor has cooled and the hounds have walked back to their kennels, could a still small voice of dissent be raised. Nobody was killed. So far as we know, nobody was seriously injured. . . . If the calamity howlers and the purveyors of panic have their way . . ."

What ways are these to settle complex and intricate matters? What troubles me about all of this—the chanters and the columnists alike—is that I am convinced there is absolutely no way that these people, people expressing strong opinions on both sides of a highly complex unknown—no way that these people can have any degree of certainty about their positions. Our evidence is not conclusive. Real authorities are divided. This is not the time to try and bring answers through hysteria, not the time to make sly pleas and cries of fear.

Some things about the nuclear puzzle are clear. The industry has not had a great production record. There

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have been enough unscheduled shutdowns and accidents to cause concern. On the other hand, the nation needs power. Simply stopping all reactors will only substitute one problem for another, for alternate power sources must be found. (In the Midwest the past few years, environmental groups have actively opposed the construction of new fossil fuel fired electric generating plants, claiming that these plants pollute the environment as much as or more than nuclear plants. When asked what alternative power sources exist if neither nuclear nor fossil fuel plants are acceptable, leaders of the groups respond that they favor the return to a simpler, more agrarian life for the nation.)

Is the unknown factor of danger of sufficient magnitude to cause us to give up the very real advantages of great amounts of power? How do we evaluate the meaning of danger? How much danger is it prudent to tolerate? How do we weigh the advantages and the disadvantages?

I do not think we should approach these questions waving signs and chanting rimbles. I do not think we should perceive them through the evasions of public relations press releases. We sorely need alternative methods of decision making in this matter. We need wisdom.

Leo J. Hertzel
Duluth, Minn.

Editor's note: In a postscript to the above, Hertzel–a contributing editor of this magazine–remarks: "What this line of reasoning leads to is a super Science Court." See the NAR, Spring 1978, pp. 25-26, for a discussion of the Science Court.

* * *

To the Editor:

I read with great care John Lindberg's "Composition: Cult or Competence?" [Winter 1977]— because I am one of those writing teachers who often "improvise and extemporize" from day to day, and feel we should be doing better.

But Mr. Lindberg himself will have to do better if he wants to make a True Believer out of me—or if he wants to give a true picture of what writing teachers are like these days.

He will, for one thing, have to stop making silly generalizations about "the average English teacher." He will have to name names and cite sources when he talks about those who view literary compositions as artifacts of a "quasi-mystical imaginative perception in the mind of the creator as cultural hero." What are the names of the books in which composition is described this way? I want to read them too. I need all the help I can get. Unfortunately, Mr. Lindberg's insistence on describing the enemy simply as "my colleagues" leaves us suspecting he may be setting up straw men, a technique I am sure he discourages in his students' writing.

Readers who are not English teachers should know: the situation is more complex than Mr. Lindberg lets on. In fact, composition teachers are not polarized into "devotees of the creative imagination" and those who have seen the linguistic light. (Alert readers will notice that behavioral/linguistic methods begin to assume a "quasi-mystical" glow of their own in Lindberg's able hands.) Most composition teachers are doing the best they can, and steadily improving their students' skills in a field where—Mr. Lindberg's apodictic tone notwithstanding—no one has demonstrated unequivocally that some methods work all the time and others never work at all. Mr. Lindberg's article is making the same kind of extravagant claims for linguisitics that some linguistics scholars themselves were making five or ten years ago. Most of the scholars have since thought better and moderated their claims.

No one book, no six books, will inevitably produce good writing classes. The Herum and Cummings *Writing: Plans, Drafts and Revisions,* has been around for seven years—time enough to have conquered the world if it was meant to. I know Mr. Cummings and believe his methods work for him. But I know teachers who have tried them and found them unworkable. I have used Hall's *Silent Language* in classes and found it helped the students' writing not a whit. It's just more complicated than that.

By calling attention to some books and approaches we may have missed, Mr. Lindberg has done composition teachers a service. But by self-righteousness, overstatement and a bullying tone, Mr. Lindberg has weakened his own case and presented a distorted picture of the state of the art of teaching writing.

George Slanger
Minot State College
Minot, N.D.

The NAR welcomes letters from readers. We prefer brevity, and ask the right to edit for reasons of style and space limitations – never for reasons of content.

* * *

To the Editor:

What is happening to fiction these days? I'm not talking about the mass popular blockbusters-turned-movies like *Jaws, Exorcist, Godfather,* etc. I mean the fiber of American literature, evidenced by what appears in literary magazines such as *The North American Review* and a thousand others. And I'm not talking about technical expertise or "good" writing. I mean the subjects, themes, and relationships between people.

Your Fall 1978 issue was typical of what American fiction is becoming in many literary magazines. I'm not condemning, just inquiring. I'm no literary historian or social scientist . . . just a reader who tries to write some himself, and who tries to understand. So, I'm uneasy at the barrage of mothers burning their babies, children shooting each other, social outcasts seeking suicide in the streets, casual pain inflicted for entertainment value. It's more (and worse) than a passive negative statement about life. It's an aggressive onslaught on everything that gives comfort, security, and meaning to people. I realize that one of fiction's roles is to explore such things—but does exploration necessarily entail destruction?

We've all heard that art is the vanguard of human expression, the presage of mass destination. Fiction writing is not so much a reflection of our present as it is an extraction of our subconscious' leading edge. In view of this, is American short fiction telling us we are empty of spirit, doomed to self destruction? Are we condemning ourselves with what we write? Is the end of us all to be found on a rooftop somewhere pumping high-powered rifle slugs at our neighbors; running our cars over the local priest; raping our sisters?

What the hell is happening to our fiction—and what does that mean for us?

Stephen E. Schlarb
Hobbs, N.M.

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THE COMEDY OF ERROR

The editor, Mr. Wilson, gently questioning my suggested change of column head from ". . . another man's poison" to "Cuttings," asked if it were meant to indicate a mellowing. He did not seem to suggest that, age considered, this might be overdue; on the contrary, I caught a faint undertone of regret as if, age considered, I might be retreating. No more Cry havoc! A magazine needs someone to do that, someone to represent non-fictional dismay. That someone must, moreover, have style—so as not to sound grossly moralistic—and wit, to anesthetize the area during surgery. It was perhaps this latter thought which led me to suggest to Mr. Wilson that "Cuttings" might be taken two ways. He nodded, but was not fooled. He knew by the look of my previous column—which should have appeared under the new title—that I was beguiled. "The Upper Reaches of Memory" he sub-titled it, as if in one bound I had gone beyond reach of the naked eye, upwards and inwards, the mythical last stage of the human bean. (*Sic.*) We shall see.

Speaking of stages of the human: I have been following, doggedly, the Shakespeare plays on television. In the enforced schooling of my adolescence I found Shakespeare a breathy writer. He could never get to the main point because he was always distracted, making a dozen other points along the way. One word led not so much to another as to another analysis of human behavior and condition. The reason offered was that, as a poet writing in the poetic form, he was not allowed patches of the ordinary. He was allowed at most patches of comedy and of farce. Thus Dogberry, thus Bottom. Thus Lear's Fool? Patches of the ordinary? The man was incapable of it. If you hired him today as a writer for Bob Hope he'd write you Charlie Chaplin. Only his ruses of plot were ordinary—those endless disguisings, twinnings, unmaskings, overhearings. Those were ordinary enough for anybody—mythic metamorphoses reduced to prank, to monkey-tricks. For the boys and their buxoms in the pit? Did the butcher and the baker *stand* there, for three hours, while this and that one swooned, declaimed, denied, pledged by their troths and so declared, in a manner once seen, twice learned? Do we now *sit* there, unswerving, these three hours of televised declamation, not understanding half we hear, or hearing half we feel? It's breathy. Convoluted. Presumably, I thought, one could get up and take a walk or an extended relieving, absent oneself a while from felicity, and come back to Mr. Shakespeare on film with little lost that one would either care about losing or would not have lost in any case. I decided to try it. I found I couldn't quite bring myself to leave the screen. My body was ready but my spirit wanted to stay. So I went on watching, doggedly.

Earnestness, I suppose, starts early. I have no information as to when it leaves off. I recall the time of my graduation from college. A dread hour. Anxiety and depression kept company even then, though for reasons both more clear and more communal than now. World War II had begun its early installments. Sometimes in strangely scripted ways such as Greek freighters pursuing money, being themselves pursued and sunk by German submarines, possibly practicing. I recall that interpretation, though it may have been only my own, the construct of a melancholy, graduating mind. The same mind which chose to pass over such vast cause for anxiety in favor of something closer to home, the warmer problems of self. For example, was I to become a teacher or a writer?

I had already been accepted to graduate school. John Houseman was not at the time teaching at Harvard, but one knew the rigors of a Ph.D. Or could easily find out, as I did by knocking at the dormitory door of a young published poet pursuing a Ph.D. in English at Yale. He opened the door some six inches, and peered out. Hello, I said. Was he writing, finding time to write? Write! He didn't even read, at least nothing less than a hundred years old. Not even a goddam newspaper! Goodbye.

I didn't feel secure. Perhaps he was exaggerating. Perhaps he was the wrong one to ask. Why I thought Chauncey Brewster Tinker would be the right one to ask I not only can't remember, I can't imagine. Unless it was just that, the unimaginable, which has great authority.

Professor Tinker was a Great among the teacher-actors, the volcanic trodders of the blackboards of that era. We had a clutch of them, and they all had three names. And such names! Chauncey Brewster Tinker. William Lyon Phelps. Robert Dudley French. (No Bart Giamattis then, let me tell you.)

Unapproachable either by nature or necessity, Professor Tinker was formidable. In the French sense of the adjective. One did not pass the time of day, one did not ask for clarifications, one did not preen his little knowledge, with Professor Tinker. One attended. He had taught of Samuel Johnson for so long that he had become a Samuel Johnson. Or at least become a replica of the choleric side of Samuel Johnson. (Out of his shyness, one would say nowadays.) He was long and lank, favored a Prussian haircut, carried a large, red, bulbous nose in the middle of his face. (Am I reporting or imagining that face? I can't tell.) Mellifluous, forceful in his lecturing, he was abrupt, awkward, off

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the podium. And it was at the door of this man's office I found myself poised to knock.

Poised? Trembling, rather. I had never before been to this office nor known where it was. I thrust my knuckles twice at the door without touching it. The third time I touched it. He did well to hear the little sound. "Yes!" he commanded. I had never heard yes used as a command.

I opened the door and stood outside. He was seated at his desk, green-shaded desk lamp lit in midday. He turned toward me but did not rise nor invite me in. I think he stared at me. I don't remember getting out my question but I know what it was: Can a person teach and write at the same time, did he think?

Instead of answering he pushed himself back from his desk, got up, said he was going to the Co-op and I might walk along if I wished.

So we set out for the Co-op. He didn't say a word, just kept striding ahead. Only when we reached the corner and had to wait for traffic to pass did he say anything. He turned part way to me and, looking off down the street, said, "Young man, as to your question. It is not a new one. I remember an earlier student of mine asking the selfsame question. I recall my answer. I said to him that the question was worthy of consideration only if he had some demonstrated capacity for writing. I told him I saw no evidence of such a capacity in his case. His name was Sinclair Lewis. Now, go and do as you will."

His advice, while not reassuring, was permissive. My decision, while not clear, was firm. I would not give up my writing career for teaching. (I had published two poems in our college magazine.) Nor, as you see, have I done so. Nor do I know even now the answer to that question. Largely, I believe, because other answers came and went, other probabilities of blunder kept presenting themselves. As my history grew, so did its paragraphs of mistake. They were going to need indexing before long.

At one stage of the inward journey I dreamed this passage: The world is my supervisor, I shall not lack correction.

I woke up still feeling fear and secret delight. I had been in the garage which was back of our house up against the wooden fence of the orchard. The asphalt drive led up alongside the house then turned sharply into the garage. My father could make that turn without braking or correcting, in a swoop, scary and just perfect. He could also deny me a ride in the car, in any of his cars, "for a long time," because I had stolen money from his bureau. His cars were Cadillacs and LaSalles. He had a lot of them at his agency downtown, and brought home a new one every few weeks, "breaking them in." I knew what that meant. I sat in every one of them in the garage. I shifted their gears, turned their wheels, stretched down to push on the place of power, the accelerator pedal itself. Whatever God was in words, the accelerator pedal made Him flesh.

There was no car in the garage now. I had pulled down the door so Anna couldn't see me or come looking for me without warning. I had seven licorice sticks—the thick nickel ones, not the penny whips. (My father wasn't so smart; by the time he noticed it, I had stolen wisely calculated sums for months, and had money hidden all around the yard and in the cellar behind the old root beer bottles. I was, in fact, rich.) I also had with me in the garage a nickel cigar, which I was smoking. Between puffs I chewed on the licorice sticks, one after the other. I don't remember how many I ate or how much of the cigar I smoked before I got sick as a dog. Everybody said sick as a dog. We had a dog and he never got sick. I thought I was dying, whatever that is. And I felt so surprised in my mind. Only a minute ago I felt so good, warm and hidden and powerful.

I didn't know about sin. My parents only talked of good and bad. Mostly about bad. Good was what you were when you weren't bad. Report cards, lost gloves, lying, touching yourself, coming home late from playing, keeping clean—one way or another you ran into good or bad every day. Or sometimes both together, like when my report card had twelve A's and one B and my father said, What happened here, and pointed to the B. He was smiling, but I had been waiting hours for him to come home, to show him my report card.

One stands (one sits, one finally lies) corrected. Education starts early and is always there, always ready to inflict consequences. *Serious* writing is always doing that too, telling us what's what and how it differs from what should be, or from what we thought was what. We may grow to enjoy the learning enough to endure the correction. Even then, doesn't one still wince at the thought of watching Lear? Shakespeare is our virtuoso of the Mistake. He lays out our opportunities one by one: power, parenting, shifting identity, delay, deceit, superstition, hot pants. He compels us endlessly with our misbehavings, and can do so because no other element of living so fascinates us as our mistakes. (No other element of dying so appeals to us as forgiveness, the ultimate eraser.)

I recall another lesson along the way. It was given to me by a burro in New Mexico. A handsome fellow with the holy cross of brown hair one could see, or pretend to see, on him. It suited me since I had some pretensions of Franciscan behavior (only towards animals). I bought him and took him home to my adobe. We would pal around together, me riding. My problem was to erase the east. I bought white cotton pants and a straw sombrero. As often happens in our best stories, I forgot to consider whether the burro had a problem that might run counter to mine. He did. The burro's problem was how to keep people off his back. Like Professor Tinker, he had arrived at the solution by way of The Curve of Complexity, which as we know leads at last to the simple answer. (There is no answer on earth that is not simple; only the way to it is complex.) The burro made not the least resistance to being mounted. When you were firmly settled and comfortable he moved off without command—indeed, despite any command whatever—in a most leisurely, civilized, Sunday-in-the-park amble . . . and scraped you off against the nearest tree. There were not many trees where he came from. Finding himself suddenly living in a grove of cottonwoods must have spurred his faith in the shaping destiny. He was a contented burro.

Evidently I wasn't going to make it even as Sancho Panza, which for a time seemed a reasonable aim. Quixote I'd long since found best left to fantasy. Or to old age. Yes, when I no longer wanted the maiden for myself, I'd save her from somebody else. Or was it Life I would save, with wise words, high deeds? Or was it *my* life I would save, there at the end? Canceling out in one crusade the comedy of error. To die in a white light, in a shaking of the heavens—we all

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dream of it. We dream of specific people in our personal history staring up at it, especially our unbelievers, our punishers. There they are, awe-struck at our final magnificence. Punished by it.

One can talk of these matters but it always sounds slick. Especially when death is involved. The endless monkey-chatter of Death and Dying seminars, like children seriously misinforming each other about sex. The real thing seems to come either in silence or an unstoppable gush of words fighting against the period.

There was a war going on in Korea while I was living in a village of twelve adobe houses tucked down the side of a canyon east of Albuquerque. I had to teach my Boxer dog his commands in Spanish because he and I were the only English-speaking residents of this community, where the people made their own goat cheese and jerky and had been here so long, family after family, that they no longer knew when their ancestors had first come up to New Mexico.

At the bottom of the canyon was a deep arroyo, dry ten months of the year, but when the first filling came it sounded—I will not forget the first night of it—like an express train had torn loose from its tracks and was bearing down on your house. That happened, of course, in spring, whenever the first runoff occurred in the mountains behind us. The *Sandias*—watermelon mountains, because of their color at sunset. Farther north, toward Taos, where the color and perhaps the settlers were more intense, they were called *Sangre de Cristo*—Blood of Christ mountains.

The children of the village herded the goats. And perhaps inevitably, perhaps fatalistically, grew reckless about the arroyo, and paid for it with a life. The night of the day young Antonio drowned felt endless. The wake went on and on. We cried, we ate, we spoke of death, we (the men) drank, we spoke of Tony, of life, of Christ and His mercy, of suffering, of pain that cannot be borne and yet is borne. We smoked one cigarette after another. I left about three in the morning, exhausted, hollow. To be awakened before dawn by a sound that raised the hair on my spine. A sound faint, unidentifiable, yet more compelling than the roar of water coming down the arroyo. I went to the window, without the least sense of what I would find. Opening it, I saw and heard the source together. Flickering candles were coming down the side of the hill across the arroyo, and out of the dark—a desert dark with no light but the disembodied candles and vast stars—came a low wave of sound, pulsing, an animal sound. No, human. A dirge. They were singing without pitch. They were singing sounds I had never heard, twisting slowly down the hill. Sounds of Africa? Arabia? Synagogue sounds. A song so old there would be none to remember where it came from.

In the morning I went to the university. Analyzed a poem. Tried to scrape some colleagues off my back. (To be without a doctorate was to be anybody's burro.) Began writing an article that would bring me a brief burst of fame. Drank in the afternoon to keep off a hangover yet a while. Argued at dinner about Korea. Called a neglected friend and stayed the night with her.

I didn't go home for two days. I accomplished prodigies. Was told twice to shut up.

Demonstrated in my best lecture ever that there wasn't a line in Shakespeare's tragedies that didn't need to be there.—*Kenneth Lash*

Coming in the NAR:

Return of the 4-Minute Short Story — Offerings by Randall Schluter, Terry Spohn, Ken Denberg, Mark Gillette, Inara Cedrins, and others

Virginia Woolf's Sanity—A discussion of her attitudes toward middle age by Margaret L.M. Gullette

Humanist Engineering—An insight by Peter Hartley into the problem of choosing good philosophies over bad in the environmental field

Of Note:

The North American Review was one of five finalists in the Fiction category of this year's National Magazine Awards, administered by Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. The other finalists were The Atlantic Monthly, Esquire, Ms., and The New Yorker. The NAR is proud of the three authors—Jonathan Baumbach, Perry Glasser, and Roberta Israeloff—who represented us in the competition, and pleased to convey our congratulations to Richard Yates, whose story "Oh, Joseph, I'm So Tired" was the eventual Fiction winner for The Atlantic Monthly.

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FROM THE MUD HUT

Nine poems by Jennifer Rankin

I first met Jennifer Rankin in England, as she was on her way to Australia and I to Venice. Later I stayed with her in Sydney after my visit to the Adelaide Poetry Festival in February 1978. At this time she was feeling very high. Her first major book of poetry had been accepted for publication in England by Secker & Warburg, and she was looking forward to this as an extension beyond Australia, where she was already well-known both as a poet and as a playwright, author of the controversial play, *Bees*. Three weeks after I had left for Canada, she discovered that she had cancer. She underwent chemotherapy, with no positive results. Finally she turned to meditation, and began to improve almost immediately. She is currently practicing meditation under the supervision of a medical doctor who speculates that meditation improves the body's natural immunity system and allows it to combat cancer.

This would be unnecessary information if the poems in *From the Mud Hut* had been composed under ordinary circumstances. In fact, they were all written in the three weeks between the time I left Australia and the time Jennifer Rankin made the discovery that she had cancer. A number of them accurately predict the process she was later to go through, including her terrifying episodes in the hospital and her subsequent recovery. *From the Mud Hut* is thus one of the most startling examples I've yet come across of what Graves refers to as "the proleptic imagination." *–Margaret Atwood*

JENNIFER RANKIN's book Earth Hold, *with prints by Australian artist John Olsen, appeared in England in January, this year. Her poems have been published in* Aspect, Makar, Poetry Australia, Poetry Review, South West Review, *and other periodicals.* From the Mud Hut *is a poetry sequence consisting of four sections and a sequel, of which only section II is printed here.*

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1.

Often on those nights
as I hunched on the swaying bench
(built by my brother his soul-offering)
beside the massive warmed stone that bore the flaming wood
listening to bursting cones and the sap
rising up to be freed
here! now! by the healing heat
I would feel her bitter dreaming
I would look up suddenly into her face
as it stared
deep into my lit hair

and in that moment before memory and evasion set us apart
I would be drawn to her in the spitting of fire
our days touching her eyes lashed over with my hair
my new life filling then with all her undone wandering

and in the days that followed
I would walk into the paddock
lie face up in the dry grass

and brazen it out under the farthest sky.

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2.

I am being chased again
around and around beneath this fierce night

I can hear laughter

they all blur now
as they toss their tree-limbs onto the blazing fire

I can hear them chanting
they are raising their glasses to the tiny stars

is this my pyre? is this my pyre?

3.

My shoes under my bed must not be left alone
I place them together as this night begins.

Standing on this green garden seat I must take care
I must listen for the creak.

Do not beat the door where you enter from the street
can't you see it is dying?

The wombat has dug its hole deep into the mud walls.
The rim of the wound is rough with scratching.

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4.

These are some of the darkest days
wind thundering at the glass of this room
the walls bending turning again as they did before
moving in squeezing the sick bed looming above it
backing away only for the rapid frightened breathing
and the eyes that stare from the bed at the walls

gathering themselves for the final blind roar.

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5.

A man is following me

I hurry away from the tram-stop
straight into the street of laurel trees

I hear him close behind stepping faster
we criss-cross the street together

I check the distance to the end
my school shoes ringing out too loud

I feel his shadow in all the shadows
I feel his faltering

A man is following me
and I am getting to know him

all my life I have moved with his shadow
pacing the street in this slow mad dance.

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6.

I am locked into this room
photographs spill out from its walls
they litter this desk
each thin flexing sheet its own inquest.

They say you were too beautiful
you were only your body and your vacant face.
Lovely lovely Renée, how was it back there inside all that?
The endless flashing bulb
the thumb-prints now marking your face.

The women walk in the avenue
dresses tight against their thighs.
Your parasol is held straight
your hand touches the leash that leads out of this picture.

Again the women are under the trees
in this new white heat they throw the dice
they laugh and their eyes move off and into the sea.
Only a century of practice passes this time.

Now it is last summer and I am out of this room.
A woman, old and beautiful, places her arm about my shoulder.
We stroll together through the grass,
we are strangers and friends.
Casually we measure our step
triumphantly we pick our way!

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7.

When the floods came
the wind too hurling in gales
released from the vast plateau of nothingness

when we were all sucked down
exhilarated by the simple action
of water falling into the earth

then I wanted to send you a telegram
world-traveller, student of the earth

I wanted to let you know
what it was like in this new ark
before the waters dried and the land muddied and cracked

taking us back with itself into itself.

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8.

I sit in a long hall
facing the faces I dare not examine.
On my plate are two cakes
they are for fellowship in this place of the court
of the state of my brother

upstairs his bed in the bed after bed after bed

downstairs I am this visitor in my sunday dress
and for the rows of boyfaces who stare
I say, skinny girl this is no old movie,

and when the fight breaks out as it must
and the boss is acting tough
the boy who sits opposite
puts into my hand this small blue brooch.

The fight is loud at the end of the hall
the boys bang their feet on the floor
the boss is giving more than he gets
my brother is falling in the long grass of the paddock

and the brooch is cool in my hand
the brooch is cool and well-hidden inside my hand.

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9.

I stand by this black stove
carefully selecting the wood

it is as important as you said
more so now that the city is near and available

I choose each piece for heat and length of burning
I vary it according to the food that I cook.

Walking in through these walls
this night laughing with him

his mouth against mine
my skill in breaking in quite unsurpassable

it is these tasks that have taught me

your tough years of training
how to select to keep house

to lock out

to break in.

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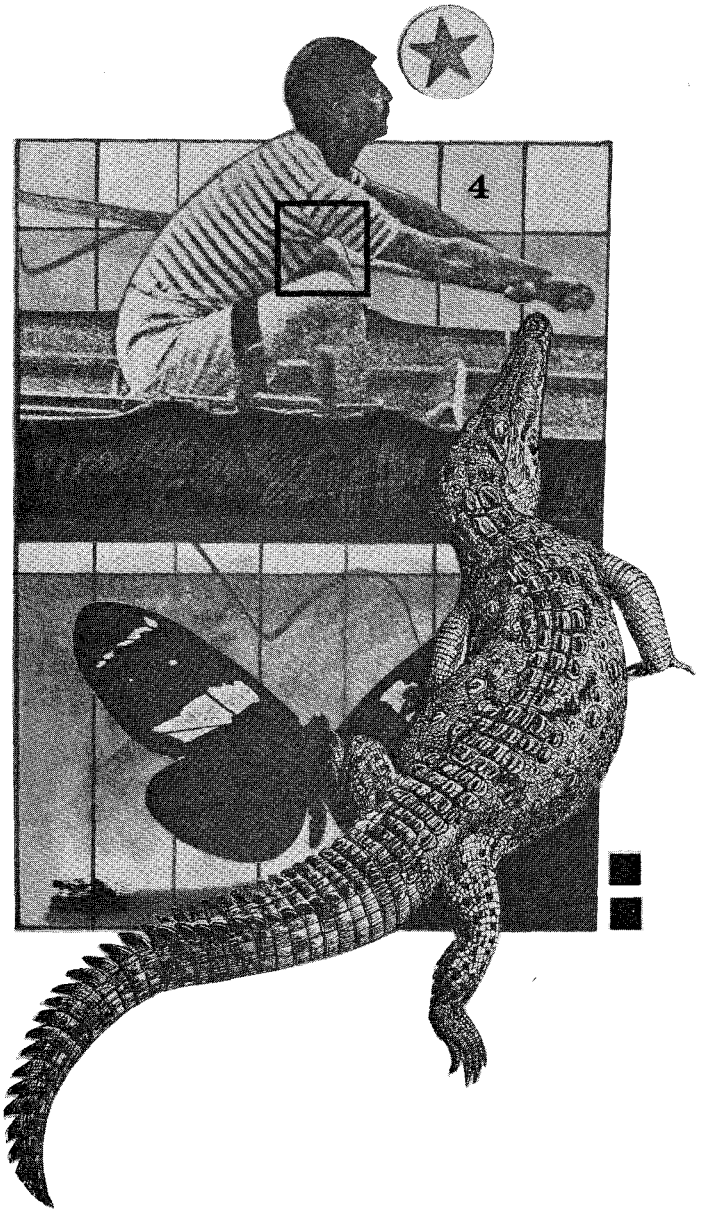
CHRIST PREACHING AT THE HENLEY REGATTA

GUY DAVENPORT and ROY R BEHRENS



Isn't it lovely, the river, with its flags and barges and laughter and music carrying so far over the water? How curiously the tuba, bouncing like the Bessy in a Morris dance, comes through the windwash, while all the other instruments fade in and out of a deafness.

Henley on such a day has touches of Deauville and of Copenhagen, and the Thames through Oxfordshire gleams as if Canaletto, Dufy, and Cézanne had got at it. Flags of Oxford and Cambridge, Sweden and France, Eton and the United States, of Leander andd Thames, Harrow and Bordeaux, rill and snap in our skittish Engish breeze.

Mrs. Damer's sculpted heads of Thames and Isis look from the posts of the High Street Bridge at Scandinavians smiling and gathering to a clapping of hands before the chantry house and at a file of gypsies of the Petulengro clan moved along by the admonitions of a constable.

Above the noise of automobiles and motorcycles there are pipes and drums playing *Leaving Rhu Vaternish* as they swing with Celtic pluck over the bridge. A county fair at Olympia! And English bells above it all, a course of changes joyously in the air.

—*Sex quattuor tris, quinque duo,* Berkshire calls.

—*Duo tris quattuor, quinque sex,* the answer falls.

—*Twa threo fower fif six, six fower, threo fif twa,* reply the bells of Oxfordshire.

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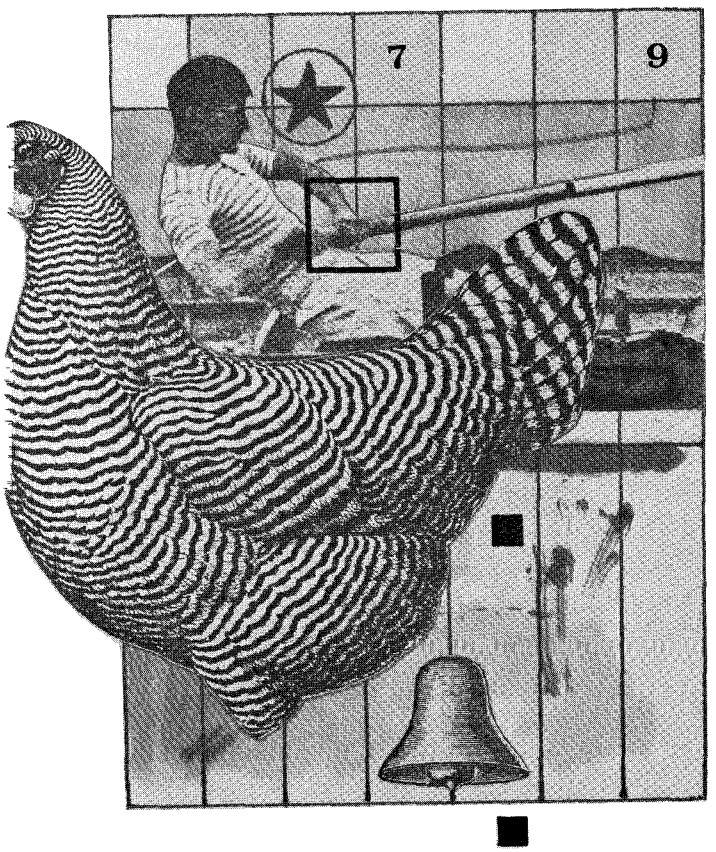

Through a window, beyond the geraniums on the sill, you can see a photograph of the Duke of Connaught in a silver frame, wearing a leopard skin, head and all. Its jaws fit the duke's head in a yawning bite. The skin of its forelegs drapes his shoulders, its tail hangs between his legs, and its hind feet dangle at the duke's tasseled kilt.

—Commander of a Bicycle Regiment, says Reggie to Cynthia after they have squeezed each other gazing at the duke's photograph, he was returning a salute while wheeling along in review when he wobbled and crashed, engaging himself so intricately in the ruin of his machine that a boffin from the medics had to come and extricate him don't you know.

—Reggie old thing! screamed Cynthia. Sausage and mashed!

She was as shy and obvious as a rose, but she could stand on one leg, touch her heel to her butt, flip her scarf and laugh like a gasping halibut.

—Cynthia old darling! Pip pip, what?

Her scarf is in the colors of the London Rowing club. Curls crisp as leaves flourish around her neat tam. Having laughed, she skips and hums, and chucks Reggie under his chin.

They throw themselves into each other's arms. The interested eyes observing them are those of the painter Raoul Dufy, who has come to sketch the Regatta. He wiggles his fingers and smooths his hand along the air to see English brick, the tricolor against ash and yew, panamas and blazers, the insignia of barges carved in oak argent and d'or, taupe and cinnamon. Not he but Seurat should be here. And Eakins and Whitman. And Rousseau.

regardez Georges Seurat ces verts
et ces azurs ces outriggers
si étroites et si légères

cette rivière plus bleue
que les yeux saxons
regardez cet homme si mysterieux

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He jumps nimbly, Raoul Dufy, out of the way of a Jaguar XKE nosing toward the bridge and gives it a manual sign of French contempt.

les coups des avirons les étincelles d'eau
ces épaules cougar ou il y a en marche
des souris sous le peau

ô filles minces ô garces oiseaux en vol
mère truitées autruches milords et morses
ô gigue des parasols

rameurs grands insouciants et blonds
et delà en maillot rouge
près de la rive un brave garçon

les mains en conque et florentines
les joues gonflés et romanesques
un triton gosse au chapeau mandarine

qui trompete a travers
la lumière nordique des après-midis immobiles
un son peut-être imaginaire

que l'oreille soit la preuve
un air moiré et grec et dur
et musclé comme la fleuve

Isambard Kingdom Brunel, spanner of rivers and oceans, pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

A man in an ulster and cloth hat searches the pavements and edges of gardens for the droppings of dogs, which, if the way is clear, he puts in his pockets, for later inspection in his room above the Swan and Maiden. He is, as Raoul Dufy does not know, Stanley Spencer.

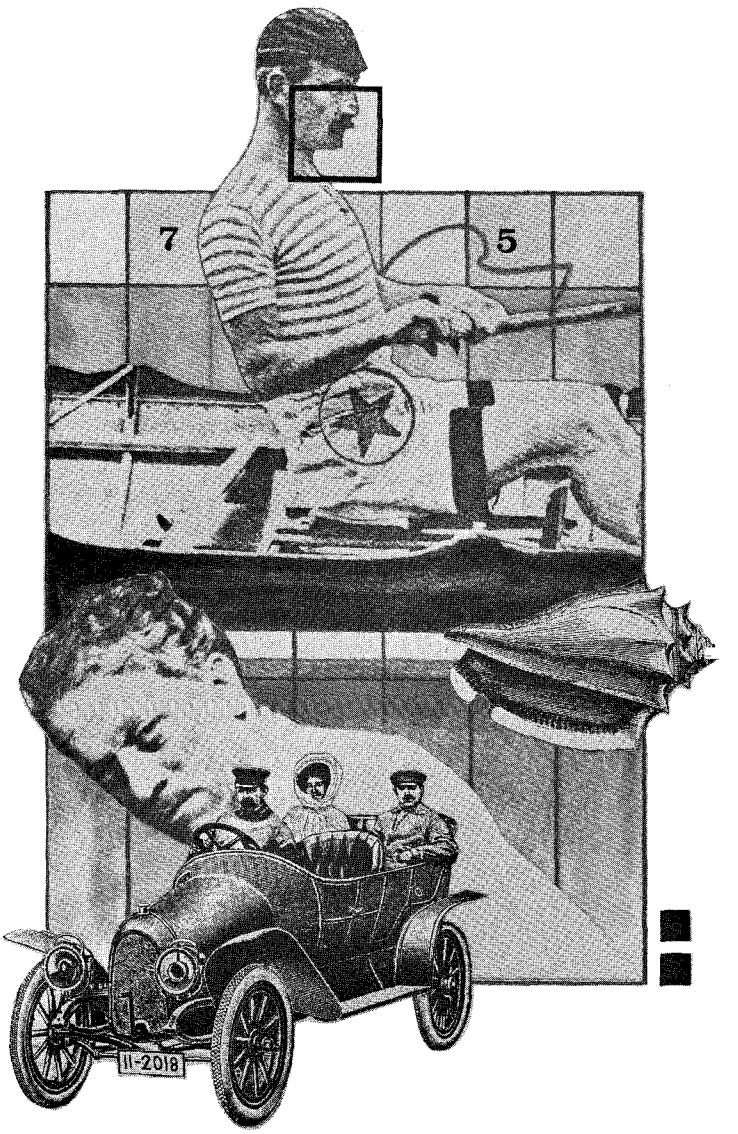
A nanny across the street asks herself whatever is that man doing, and her charge, a boy in a sailor suit, reads her eyes and answers.

—Picking up dog shit and squirreling it away on his person.

—God save the poor sod, says the nurse.

—Now he's pulling his pudding.

—Charles Francis!



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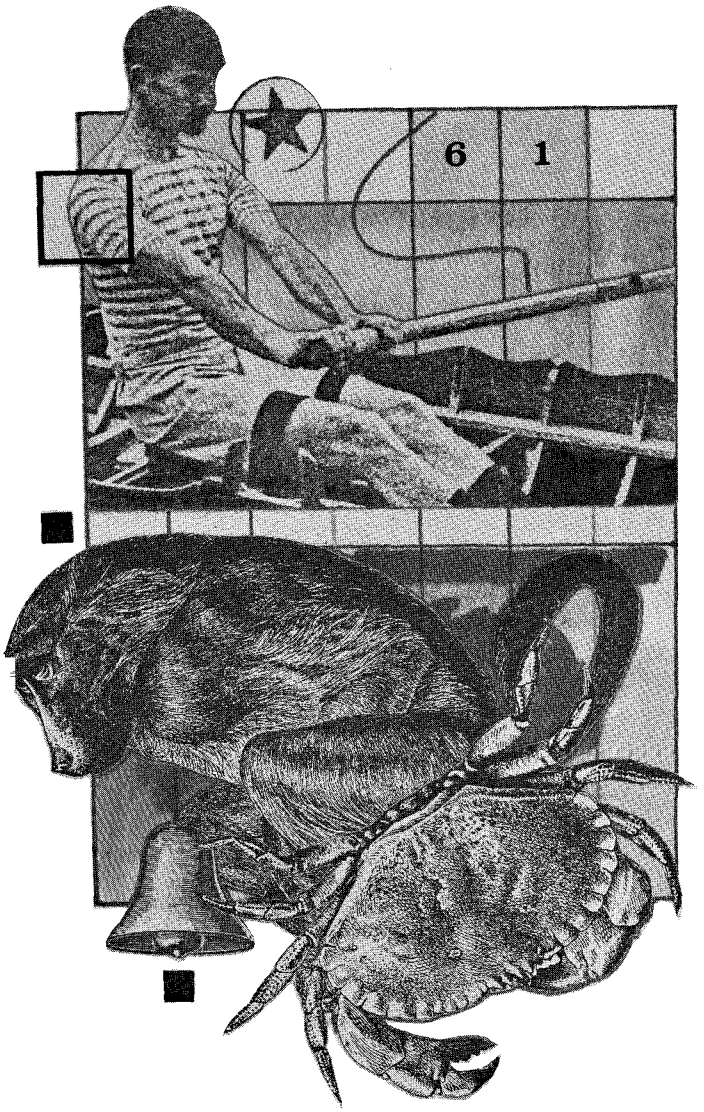

An old woman in a plaid shawl has caught Stanley Spencer's attention. She wears gaiters and a fisherman's hat. The crop of white whiskers on her chin pleases Spencer. He imagines her as a girl, as a bride, as a woman getting fleshy about the hips, a woman who would cast her eyes upward when she laughs. If only he could see her feet.

Dancing angels know a fire
makes this river wind and air
seem an iron snarl of wire

The pipe band returns over the bridge, playing *The Hen Scratches in the Midden.* The melody perplexes a poet who has been dreaming with open eyes. Was it the green of the girl's eyes who was talking with British toothiness to a grenadier in mufti, or the gorgeous quiet of the gardens beyond these ancient walls that loosed his mind into revery? Louis Jean Lumière, pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

Girlish, vivacious, and brash afternoon
That lifts with the wine of its wings
From the haunted seasons of yet to be
Summer's blond and Illyrian winters.

Flat light shimmers on the Thames. An airplane drags a streamer through the air, advertising Bovril. A dowager aims her ear trumpet so that a constable can direct her electric wheelchair.

—If Mum will turn left at the pillar box just there at the chemist's and then turn sharp left at the Bird and Baby, you will find yourself right at the royal enclosure. Can't miss it, I shouldn't think.

—Left and left?

Off and away, Spencer's eyes on her Princess Marie Louise hat, she buzzed past tall oarsmen in a row, their fluent sunbleached windblent hair embellished in swirls by limber gusts, Danes in singlets and shorts, with long brown legs and eighteen blue eyes. Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Swans ride downstream midriver aloof and alone.

Spencer fixes the old lady and her wheelchair in his memory, the velvet glove at the tiller, the hat that might have been Jacobean, the lace collar spiked out from the back of her neck.

She steers between French oarsmen naked as snakes save for brief white pants and whistles on a string around the neck.

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Bugles: a rill and snap of flags. Picnickers look up from their baskets. A couple with loosened clothes behind a hedge look out.

The poet from France adjusts his spectacles.

Launch the antique swan whose silence began
Under Babylon where the wisteria hung,
When he should have sung in the red pavilions
Passacaglia, toccata, and fugue.

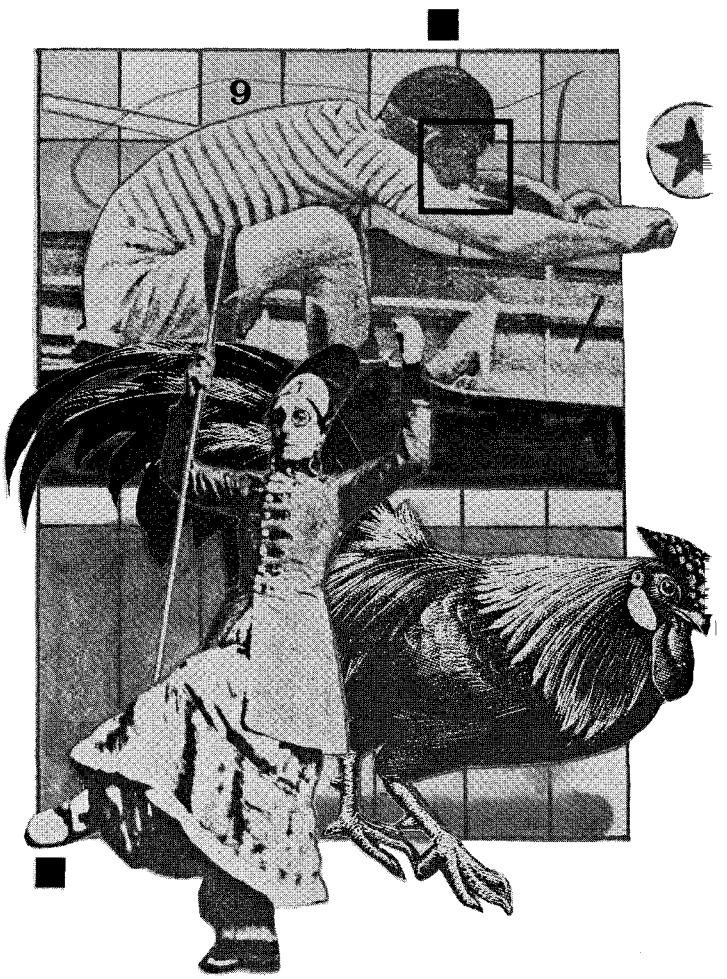
He inspected shingles, brick, and windows. Bees stitched along the bells of a file of hollyhocks. *Greatly comforted in God at Westchester,* a voice came through a parasol. And *ever so nice, ame shaw.* And from a clutch of gaitered clergy, *nothing but my duty and my sin.*

There milled and trod and eddied a flock of little girls with the faces of eager mice, a family from Guernsey all in yellow hats, Mr. C.S. Lewis of Belfast in belling, baggy, blown trousers and flexuous flopping jacket, his chins working like a bullfrog's, tars from HMS *Dogfish* with rolling shoulders and saucy eyes, pickpockets, top-hatted Etonians chatting each other in blipped English, a bishop in gaiters regarding with unbelieving mouth a Florentine philosopher peeing against a wall, Mallarmé wrapped in his plaid shawl rapt.

The inward white of radiant space,
Cygnus and Betelgeuse and the Wanderers,
And swam instead but swan, exile and island and
Is now in this utter reality a brilliant ghost,
An archangelical, proud, fat bird,
Ignorant of what the stars intend by Swan.

River light wiggles on the ceiling of the Royal Danish Rowing Club locker room. Oarsmen trig of girth and long of shoulder suit up in the red and white toggery of their *roningteam.* The illapse of a Jute foot into a blue canvas shoe, the junt of hale chests under jerseys, bolled *skridtbinder,* Dorian knees remember, so transparent is time, a tanling foot into a sandal, lynx grace of athletes at The Shining Dog beyond the harness makers, potters, and wine shops on the angled and shady street that crooked from behind the Agora over to the Sacred Way those summers Diogenes made his progress in a wash of curs to the market along the porch.

How foreign and sudden these spare athletes seemed to old men who remembered William Gilbert Grace and Captain Matthew Webb. Long-legged rowers file to their boats, carrying oars like the lances at Breda in Velazquez's painting. Signal flags rise on a mast frivolling. A trumpet, a pistol shot.



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By Stanley Spencer tall oarsemen in shorts and singlets bear their boat above their windblent vandal hair. He is preoccupied with another, inward grace.

Wild Sicilian parsley
and wasps upon the pane!

Old Man Cézanne, he tells himself, was all very well for the French temperament going at things logically, vibrating with a passion for the École Polytechnique, for ratios and microscopes, precisions and a constant polishing of everything with critical sandpaper. He was a Poussin run by electricity. But that woman there shaped like a bottle and her daughter shaped like a churn, they want to be seen by Cimabue, by Polish buttermold carvers, by eyes begot of the happy misalliance of stiff northern barbaric chopped wood sculpture, polychrome embroidery, and beaten gold with autumnal Roman giant stone: roundly ungainly, stubborn as barrels, solid as brick kilns.

A coxswain light as a jockey clacking the knockers swung around his neck whistles with Jacobean trills and sweetenings that some talk of Alexander and some of Hercules, of Hector and Lysander, and such great names as these. To Spencer he is a conceited ass from the Continent, the pampered son of a Belgian manufacturer, but he excites the Petulengros who in a fatter time would steal him as merchandise negotiable on the docks.

There has not a minute been
in one thousand nine hundred years
twenty months or seventeen

But that one Christian or another
kissed his image in the mirror
standing on his slaughtered brother

A cousin of Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Aylmer Ranfurly Plunkett Ernle Erle Drax snubs a cousin of Commander Sir George Louis Victor Henry Sergius Mountbatten Lord Milford Haven. Lord Peter Wimsey and Bunter bow in passing to Bertie Wooster and Jeeves. The aging Baron James Ensor of Ostend sweeps the horizon with his ear trumpet picking up the piston click of oars, the barking of coxes, and inflorescence of Scandinavian band music, Romany cheek, an indecent proposal in French to a vicar's sister and her reply in the French of Stratford at Bow as to the pellucidity of the day's air, the freshness of all the foreign young folk, and the silvery azure of the Thames.

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Stanley Spencer pockets a nice yellow bit of dog shit and lifts off into a revery to the awful knees of Mont Sainte Victoire and the quarries at Bibémus, green wind awash in Cézanne's trees, fiercely mean old man who orders God about, and shakes his mahlstick at Him, *Seigneur, vous m'aviez faire puissant et solitaire: laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre.* A shaken fist, a plaintive cry. *I have not painted all of this, and until I do I refuse to die.*

It is the Grande Jatte, is it not? There is a lady with a whippet on a leash that will stand for the monkey, and clerks from banks, and little girls in tulle and ribbons, and people picnicking and gazing at the river and lolling on the banks. And those fat women over there with parasols from Camberwell, they make a touch of The Feast of the Sardine, do they not? The touts in their candy-stripe trousers and panamas, how they contrast with Sir Charles Parsons on the arm of The Very Reverend Dean Inge, with Margaret Jourdain and Ivy Compton-Burnett in such an inexplicable mixture of purples and greys, toques thirty years out of date.

Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini, pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

Stanley Spencer anticipates with relish the droppings in all his pockets the scorched stink of wheat bunt, the dark odor of blight, mealy mildew, the reek of fomes and juniper conk, of black punk rot, potato scald, bruised galls and scurf.

What gnathion and gullet to the Finns! They sound like foxes talking, and they laugh with their eyes. The American rowers breathe through their mouths and keep their arms crossed, and walk on the balls of their feet.

Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno Maria de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santissima Trinidad Ruiz y Picasso, pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

A roopy laugh and: I can't help it I tell you, Alfie, *whoops! Whoops!* it's the little pants they have on, you can see everything they have as plain as cups under a tea towel, *I'll die!* And: Look it, he's vomited all down his front, the poor sod, gorgonzola and beer it smells like. And: Dear chap, these noonings and intermealiary lunchings in air this electric brace me for excesses unknown at the parsonage. Would you believe that I got to pee next to one of those *matelots* with the pom-poms? His caution was, shall I say, ironic. Democracy is so exciting, wouldn't you say?

Auguste Lumière, pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

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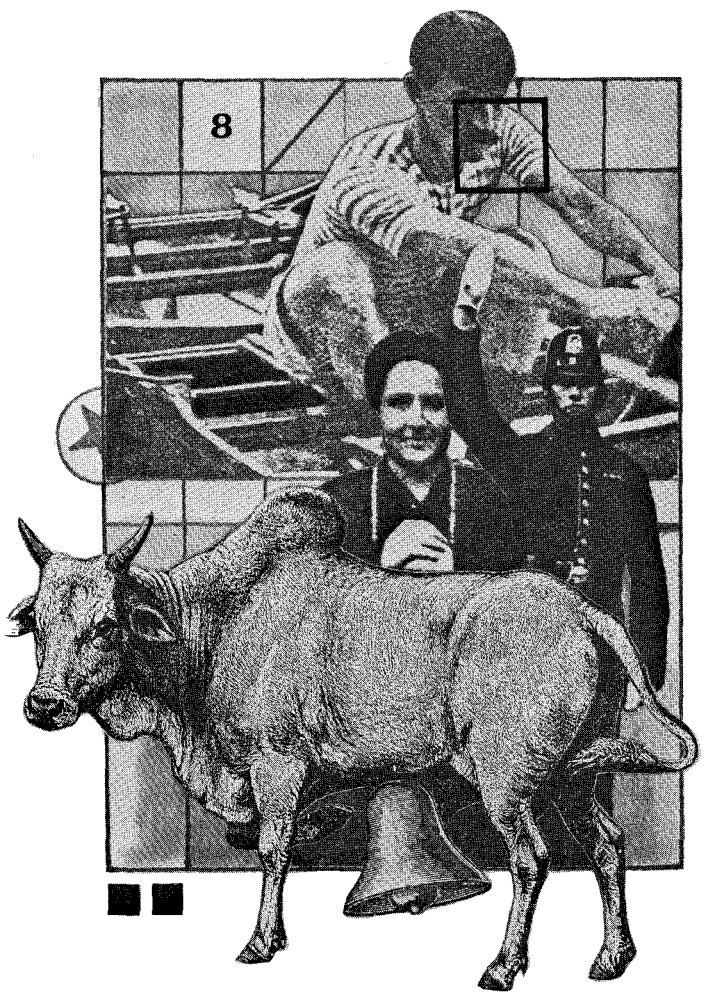

Spencer pulled his wool bell hat lower over his thatch, getting now on to fat women's elbows, the wrinkles of the tuck, and the sway of loose biceps rolling. What silly treasure of heart and head I would come and steal, soft as the field mouse's white-foot tread. Like the blind bone in Beethoven's ear, I spoke, she spoke, and the drum spoke that could and could not hear. Under Mrs. Damer's eyes of Cotswold stone the Cherwell marries the Thames.

India and Turkey were in her smile,
Madras her breasts, Izmir her hips,
That cross-eyed lady of Carlisle.

Cambridge, and Bob's your uncle! A boy with a bloody nose stands defiantly by a lamp post, answering *no* to every question a policeman puts to him. A woman stung by a wasp is being helped into a pub by a Jamaican and a Hindu. A member of Parliament who has just exhibited his shrivelled penis to three Girl Guides has sunk to the sidewalk, dead.

The crew of the Club Sporting de Marseilles climbs from its boat, victors gasping, sweating, smiling. Cameras whirr and flash as they toss their coxswain in the river. A toothy official shakes their large hands and acknowledges their Mediterranean smiles with a rabbity scrunch of his lips.

—Good show! he says.

—Sink you! they reply.

Afternoon's long shadowfall across the grass and the garden walls is like music at the end of a day of self-indulgence.

As the crowds milled to the banks for the last race, which was rowed in late level golden light, a peal of Stedmans rang out from churches roundabout.

—*Sex quattuor tris, quinque duo,* Berkshire calls.

—*Duo tris quattuor, quinque sex,* the answer falls.

—*Twa threo fower fif six, six fower, threo fif twa,* reply the bells of Oxfordshire. □

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JAMES HEARST

TWO POEMS

1. Wheelchair Blues

Two raised steps deny him
the door though it stands
wide open. No prisoner in
leg irons has less chance
of passing through the door
than this poor cuss sitting
waiting . . . for what? Help?
The last day? A miracle? He
tells himself it could be worse,
there could be three steps.
So he waits, waits in dreams,
waits days and nights as if
barriers would dissolve or faith
lift him to his white useless feet.
Love goes by in a busload of
laughter with the doors shut,
he waves but it never stops.
Oh, the poor bastard sits there
day after day dreaming of valentines
and the days before the war.

2. Shove It, Brother, Shove It

From bedroom to bathroom to
breakfast table you break your
knuckles to shove the wheelchair
toward the smell of coffee.
For you to face the morning,
dressed, cleaned, fed gives you
a day's work before the day
is under way. Read the paper,
the news "out there" seems so
much blackmail to be paid in daily
installments by a draft on the
good things you want to believe in.
You discard the map of rough roads
where your indigent legs can't
beg their way.

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Such A Wonderful Girl

Beverly Jablons

K. Dyble Thompson

"God have mercy on my soul." Her mouth moved and the words were spoken aloud. She cringed in the back seat of the taxi. Maybe she could grovel on the floor and scoop up the poor little throbbing words from where they had fallen. Put them in the ashtray.

"You say something, lady?"

No! Oh, Jeez-us. I'm crazy, she thought. It was six months since she started to say "God have mercy on my soul." She was rearranging her lingerie drawer when the words had flown out like startled birds. At first it seemed as though she heard the words as from someone else's lips. Finally, with some fear, she accepted them as her own and, sobbing, decided they came from some hollow place in her soul, in her gut, before they filled her throat and escaped. Now they were just there, unbidden, in the office, on the streets, alone in her apartment, when she was with other people.

Crazy Doris Gilman. The cab stopped at Park Avenue and 56th Street and she gave the driver a dollar tip. It was a bribe: Goodbye and forget you were a witness to my insanity.

She lived in an apartment building at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 74th Street, just a few feet from the bus stop, but more and more frequently she stepped out into the street as a taxi cruised by, its lights on, tantalizingly available. Urgently her arm would wave it to stop and she would remove herself from the small groups of people waiting for a bus. Settled back in the seat she felt lavished upon, a princess, someone's beloved. A someone who would say, "I don't want you crushed in that rush hour, honey. What do you need it for? Spend a few extra dollars on cabs—it's worth it to me."

And that was another thing. As she stalked the lobby of her office building she grunted to ignore the impulse that slyly filled the soft tissues of her brain and then her entire head. No!

"I love you."

There it was. She said it a week ago last Thursday at a sales meeting and felt fear as soon as she spoke the words. Looking around furtively at the unlikely people present she knew it was not a secret message to someone in Sales and Marketing and hoped that it had passed for a hiccup or a sigh.

I love you. Who was the I? Who was the you? Calmly, she decided that from the deepest well of some great desire she must be talking to a lost lover, a future husband or maybe her dead mother, she should rest in peace.

But that evening, looking into a store window, lured by a silk mauve evening dress, its soft folds caressing the tips of plastic feet, she said it again. "I love you." As she looked at her shimmering reflection in the glass she knew in an awful, splintering moment that she was addressing herself. She was the I and she was the you and, leaning against the window, she wept.

Dear sweet God, maybe all she was doing was confirming her worth, gathering from within, if not from without, a little affection, a little esteem. Couldn't it simply be that?

In the executive ladies room she examined her body in the full-length mirror. I'm getting flabby, she thought. She peered closer. Her mother had whispered, "My beauty, my rose."

"Die," she said suddenly to the 16-year-old girl who still waited quietly and patiently inside her for a brilliant career, a passionate man.

The day passed with one "God have mercy on my soul" and two "I love you's." She alone heard the I love you's and only her secretary heard the plea to God which sounded innocent enough and could have referred to anything.

That evening she went directly home, sharing a cab with the regional sales manager who lived with his wife and two children in a brownstone on 80th Street off Park Avenue. He long ago ceased suggesting to Doris that they have a "quickie before flying home to the nest." The parade of twenty-four-year-olds at the office was unflagging and what a quickie meant varied with the girl or where his wife was at the moment.

"A man is not monogamous by nature," he told her earnestly. "Look at the Moslems. They understand the particular needs and drives of the male and the result is a psychological and physiological satisfaction that makes them ideal husbands." Because he was an amateur trumpet player he frequently told his wife that he was playing a gig. Doris often wondered how many gigs a man could play before his wife asked to go along just to listen to the music. Surely a wife would sense that there was another level to his life. Wasn't there the imprint of other women on his body, on his mind? Locked doors behind which were sounds and laughter? Didn't she hear it? Didn't she care? Sometimes Doris felt lucky to have been spared the pain of loving.

"I have a date tonight. Don't wait up for me," she had said to her mother.

"Have a good time. Be happy. Just be happy." Her

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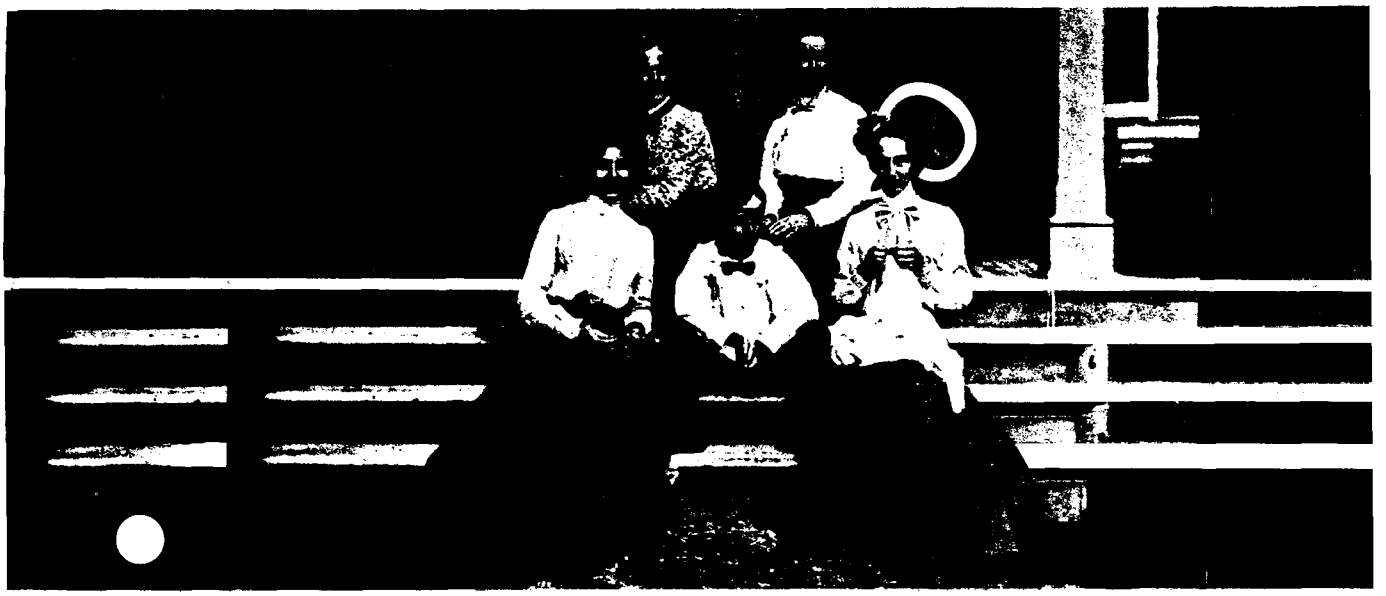

mother's reply had always been a tremble (of apprehension?).

The taxi stopped in front of her house and the sales manager hesitated a moment. But then he pecked at her cheek, opened the door and called "Ciao."

Her life was essentially solitary (she saw Lester two evenings a week and alternate Sundays) and there were many days when she longed for people. She made friends with losers, dullards, deadbeats, anyone. Just someone to call on a Saturday afternoon for a movie, a walk in the park, a cup of coffee. It helped to know she had an appointment to keep, a destination. "I have to run," she would say, "I'm meeting a friend and I'm ten minutes late already." She would arrive out of breath at the restaurant or bar or in front of a movie theatre. "Sorry I'm late," she would say apologetically to whatever friend or acquaintance was waiting; her life so full there was hardly enough time.

Tonight she wished the sales manager had asked her to have a drink with him so she could say she was in a hurry and already late. It was Wednesday and Lester was arriving at 7:30. She rushed through the lobby, nodding to the doorman who was a kind of cavalier, a foil for muggers and delivery men; she gave him too much money and liquor at Christmas.

Doris enjoyed putting the key in the lock on Wednesday evenings. Because Lester came to dinner, that was her cleaning lady day and the apartment waited for her, serene and composed, purged of all the evils of the week before as for a new beginning. Carefully she placed her handbag on a rack on the inside of the foyer closet door.

Miscellaneous boxes were labeled and piled neatly on the shelves above. On the back wall, on hooks, hung ice skates and a tennis racquet; riding boots were propped in a corner; next to them a golf bag and skis leaned nonchalantly. For each there had been an expensive outfit—a forty dollar tennis dress, a fur-lined parka—and a sense of imminence. Now she would discover a latent talent, an ability she never knew she had! She would dazzle the world with a daring slalom or a slashing backhand and in exchange the world would reveal to her its secrets. But each expectation merely filled her infrequent cocktail parties with acquaintances once met on a tennis court or at the riding stables.

Her body still damp from the shower, she stretched herself out on the bed, submitting ungratefully to the sensuality of the cool sheet. She had fifteen minutes before she had to get ready for Lester. Lester, Lester, Lester. If she said it often enough the name sounded ludicrous. She wished that people would stop referring to him as her boyfriend. Is that what he was? What a word to describe Lester. She was 30 when she met him (or was she 31?) and that was thirteen years ago. The thought jolted her. "Where is my youth?" she shrieked inside her liver, her kidneys, and in an involuntary spasm rolled over on the bed.

She hated him. God, how she hated him for all the excuses over the years and then for no longer feeling it necessary to make excuses. And he wasn't even married: it was like the punch line of a joke. Perhaps if they were clandestine lovers and there was a wife somewhere, hovering, the faint poignant shadow of someone else's agony might at least give it all some kind of authenticity.

Obviously she wasn't good enough for him to sacrifice his loneness, his Friday night poker games. He found all he needed with her twice a week and on alternate Sundays (every other Sunday he visited his sister who lived with a plumbing contractor and three children in Englewood, New Jersey). There was a time when he had tried to comfort her with vacuous promises; more recently he had become obstinate, even bold.

"Look, no one's holding a gun to your head. It works both ways. You can walk out any time you want," he said, "you're still young and attractive."

"Oh, you bastard," she said, her voice a scream, "you're not even a friend."

"I don't require that you should be my best friend," he said, fingering ice cubes in his glass like pieces of glistening armor.

Inside, a raging vixen: Screw you, Lester! Outside, a tremulous beggar: "But what about love, warmth, tenderness?" (Half her life gone and her face dear to no

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one. Whose heart would leap, she wondered, at the sight of her face in a crowd?)

"Not my bag," he said, a cool challenge.

All the following day, after these arguments, she lingered near the telephone. One never knew, Lester might call and say, "No, no, it's not true, my darling, I've made a terrible mistake, I really love you, a friend, I'm your friend, marry me."

He never called and she would go to a movie alone just to get out of the house and in the first ten minutes become completely absorbed in the story. Poor Lester. He was 54 and the strain of remaining single must be awful. What a job to keep himself for himself all these years. Sometimes a real affection for him overwhelmed her and her compassion made her smile. There, there, Lester.

At least you weren't the first (nor the second or the third) she thought with some satisfaction. She had desperately declared her love for that first man because, after all, that was why she was there under him, knowing how it felt for the first time. Wasn't it? And he had outlined the plains of her body, had reached in with a pride of ownership, into her own most secret self to become the only living, breathing being in the whole world to know how moist she was, how willing.

She saw him on Madison Avenue not long ago and looked at him blandly; the years had passed like so many hours at a party. We didn't even give them a second glance, she thought. No hello, no goodbye. Seeing him again she felt like a drunk suddenly rising to the surface of consciousness to ask, Where is everybody?

"Hey! How are ya!" he wanted to know, this once most urgent man, the discoverer of America, whose birthday should have been a national holiday in her life.

"I love you." She rose swiftly from the bed and put on a new long skirt and a softly clinging blouse and carefully made up her face. Lester had seen her with eyes meek and pale, skin sallow with fatigue, but she always prepared herself for him as though maybe, this time, a new shade of lipstick would open the door to the storeroom in which he hoarded himself.

She set the table and arranged flowers for a centerpiece. The lobster casserole was in the oven and Lester would bring the wine. He always did. She couldn't recall when they started staying in on Wednesday night but it had now become a pattern. She never ceased hoping it was the way to his heart: the little homebody, the quiet evenings, and he, Lester, would be astonished by the gladness of family life and with bugles blaring, banners waving, surrender his conceit.

It was also more convenient for bed. Lester didn't like to stay overnight and preferred to get a cab at two or three in the morning rather than accompany her home at that hour.

On Saturday nights and the alternate Sunday afternoons they went to the theatre or a movie or used Lester's season tickets to football games from October through December; hockey games from January through March; baseball from April through October. He enjoyed ice shows and water extravaganzas and once they had seen the main barge break from its moorings and carry the lead soprano out to sea.

Occasionally they would drive up to Connecticut to restaurants he had heard of and he would order scampi fra diavolo and zabaione for dessert (he had begun to carry bicarbonate of soda tablets in his pocket). They seemed to be hideaways, remnants of the prohibition era with fringed lamps on the tables, plastic flowers and sconces on the walls. Even the canned music—"You were meant for me. . . "—seemed to be from another time as though it had waited a lifetime for Doris to walk through the door.

Sometimes they went out with other manufacturers of ladies ready-to-wear, to the currently popular bars and discotheques. Often the other man's date was a young dress model wearing the firm's most expensive sample. The men would take her out on the dance floor to shimmy and shake while the girl's breasts and gyrating pelvis ricocheted off the lust which seemed to shimmer in the air between them like refracted heat. Lester's face would be flushed; he'd drink too much. Fantastic, he would call the evening, the place, the people. Fabulous. But if she and Lester went back on another night they would sit at a small table, alienated and sullen, and then leave after two

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drinks, enervated by the vigor of the young people crowding them.

What would happen, she wondered, if she went up to a girl, any girl, and whispered, It's a lie! Soon it will be all over and it will be a big nothing, she would say. Even something will be nothing. Who would believe her? Would she have believed it if she had been told? Would her mother have told her? Her mother who returned from the movies holding her heart that beat under a slack breast and glittering with memories of lingering kisses, sultry glances, duels of honor. Her mother who found an old pillowcase hidden in a closet shelf and reaching, cried: "Oi! I found a treasure—shmatas, rags!" and polished her stove with them until it shone.

One Christmas after three martinis at a company party in a midtown hotel she had walked home from 48th Street and stopped to look at a holiday display. Beside children bundled in sheep wool, their mouths smothered by plaid scarves, she pressed against the glass to watch tiny lights twinkling on synthetic trees and powdery snow falling forever, lightly touching the shoulders of shepherds who nodded unceasingly over a crêche. And in a corner of the window, life-sized grinning figures rowed a boat amidst the mechanical celebration while music pealed, "Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream . . . merrily . . . merrily . . . merrily . . . merrily . . . life is but a dream. . . ."

A dream. The whole thing's a goddam dream. It was a revelation, a truth, and her eyes blurred with maudlin tears. Ma, you lied to me! Her head wobbled as she convinced herself and the words came to her lips. "A dream . . . the whole thing's a lousy dream!" A man turned to stare at her in the new dark mink coat she had bought herself and quickly she walked away.

Everything was ready. She put a record on the phonograph and fixed a drink to buoy her up before Lester came. It helped. If she timed it right she would be gay, lighthearted, animated when he arrived.

She drank and danced. The tune was reminiscent and filled her with a nostalgia for something unknown; the banal words seemed significant and moving. Inside was the 16-year-old girl. (Had she told her to die? Live! Live just a little longer.)

The bell rang. Lester had a key but didn't like to use it. She gulped the last of her drink and put the glass in the kitchen sink. The bell rang again. Lester, it's you, she thought giddily. Lester, you fink. Lester, I hate you.

"Hi, honey," she said.

He leaned down to kiss her and sniffed. "Scotch," and ran his hands over her buttocks. The easy familiarity was not without appeal for her—Oh Lester, love me—and she gave back an affectionate squeeze.

"What a sonafabitch day," he said and removed his jacket. He walked over to the bar.

"Scotch?" he called.

"Yeah," she said, removing the bubbling casserole from the oven.

He brought her drink into the kitchen and returned to the living room to settle into a comfortable green chair, vodka on the rocks on the table at his side.

"Two hundred dresses came back," he said, turning the pages of the newspaper. "Would you believe it? Two hundred dresses! Look at this, a guy was robbed at one o'clock in the afternoon, in broad daylight. Where the hell are the cops? I knock myself out whoring those friggin' buyers and some bastard cutter hocks out a hole and calls it a sleeve. You have to see it to believe it."

She brought the casserole to the table, lit the candles and gave Lester the bottle of wine to open. In her mind she visualized two holes, two mouths gaping O.

"Terrif," he said, and began to eat immediately. "I had steak for lunch," he said. "Too much beef, I couldn't have taken any more tonight. It's like I can feel my blood getting too thick."

Later, when he returned to the green chair he belched and seemed surprised. "Maybe lobster is beginning to do something to me," he said warily. He groaned a few times, rattled the newspaper. "Unbelievable."

"Try to forget the sleeves tonight, Sweetie," she said. "You worry too much."

"I mean the Sanitation Union, the nerve of those guys." He belched again. "See?" he said with uneasy triumph. "I told you. It's got to be the lobster. Maybe I can't digest it any more." A few seconds later he said, "Cucumbers. Did you put cucumbers in the salad?"

"There were no cucumbers in the salad," she called from the kitchen.

"You know I can't digest cucumbers," he said.

Her voice rose. "I know you can't digest cucumbers."

When the phone rang, she had just finished the dishes and was rubbing some lotion on her hands. She couldn't bear facing a dirty kitchen in the morning although earlier in their relationship she used to pile everything in the sink and shut the door. The perfect hostess, career woman, homebody and then, the wench, to bed with Lester, holding, moving, touching, feeling. Oh Lester, see how wonderful I am!

"Hello?"

"Clara? It's me, Tillie." The voice at the other end was warm and certain.

"What number do you want?"

"What?"

"What number do you want?" she said. "There's no Clara here."

"No Clara." Tillie was disbelieving. "How could that be? It's me, Tillie."

"Well, you must have dialed the wrong number. That happens." Patiently she said again, "What number do you want?"

"Wait a minute . . . I'll tell you. . . ." The voice breathed heavily with each word. ". . . Nine . . . three . . . six . . . wait, let me make it out . . . yeh . . . then a four, a nine . . . no . . . a seven . . . eight and then a nine." Triumphantly, "Nine three six four seven eight nine."

"Oh," Doris said. "You dialed the wrong number. That isn't my number." She was apologetic.

"A wrong number." Tillie accepted it as truth but it was a wonderment. There was a long pause. "Aiiiiii."

"Hang up and dial again," Doris said.

There was another pause. "Well, you see, my eyes are not so good like before. So usually by day I don't dial by

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myself. My neighbor's boy comes in and dials for me. I give him a penny he should dial. But at night sometimes I can't sleep so I try myself to call my friend Clara, she can't sleep neither."

"Well maybe you can ask the boy to come in now as a favor," she said.

"Now? So late? I'm surprised at you." Tillie chided her. "He's a child, a ballplayer. All day long he plays ball. He dials and before I look around he should take a soda, a candy, he's already out the door. A boy like that is sleeping."

"I know what you can do," Doris said, "why didn't I think of it before. You can call the operator and she'll get the number for you."

"Yeah? She would do that? How do I tell her?"

"Just dial 0 for operator."

"Oi, isn't that wonderful. What's your name?"

She laughed and said, "Doris."

"A nice name for a nice girl. You see, Doris, I call my friend Clara once a day in the morning around eleven and I call my sister-in-law every other day around five in the afternoon. On the days I don't call her she calls me. That's the way we made up. So this little boy I was telling you about, he dials for a penny. My daughter she lives down the block but I can't ask her to come every time her mother wants to make a telephone call. Am I right or wrong?"

"Right, you're right," said Doris.

"Of course I'm right. She has three little kids and no help. She has a washing machine but no dryer so all day she's hanging on the roof. I could help her but my feet aren't so good and my eyes aren't so good. So what can I do?"

"Listen, you can only do what you can," Doris assured her.

"Absolutely," said Tillie, "I make her a little chicken, a little fish, so it saves her cooking. A mother wants to do something for a daughter. It's not easy to see a daughter struggle."

Lester's eyes opened in the middle of a snore. He glanced at his watch and motioned to her to get off the phone. "Who are you talking to?" he asked thickly before closing his eyes again.

"But she has a wonderful husband," Tillie said. "A lovely man. I have no complaints, knock wood. Are you married, darling?"

"No." It was a melancholy cry.

"Ahhh," murmured Tillie. A moment passed before she said with reassurance, "Well, listen, everybody has their own ways. You got a job?"

"A very good job."

"Of course! So there you are. I'm sure you're a college girl, such a wonderful girl like you. So what do you do?"

"I'm a fashion coordinator," said Doris.

"You see? Only the best," said Tillie.

"For a big company."

"Naturally," and Tillie made warm sounds in her throat. "A fashion for a big company. Isn't that wonderful." She thought about it for a while. "I don't go out so much myself so I don't need so much. For fancy I have a nice rose color silk and I wear my marquisette dinner ring and it's enough for Tillie."

"It sounds lovely," Doris said. Lester got out of the chair and stretched.

"Who the hell are you talking to?" he whispered. "Get off the phone. It's 11 o'clock already."

Doris shook her head at him. "You know," she told Tillie, "I was on Fifth Avenue today and saw some lovely cottons on sale. They'd probably be perfect for you. Very good buys."

Tillie chuckled. "Sweetheart, that's not for Tillie. I go down to Orchard Street. You know Orchard Street? That's for people like me. There they know my size; I pick up a little seersucker house dress. What else do I need?"

Lester was now standing over her. "For chrissakes, are you still talking to that wrong number?" he asked incredulously.

She waved him away, cupping her hand over the mouthpiece. "Shhhhh!"

"What's the matter?" Tillie asked. "Somebody there? I'm keeping you from something? So tell me how to get the operator."

"C'mon Doris, it's been a long day." Lester was at her side, pulling up her blouse; his hand reached in, exploring.

"Just put your finger in the last hole at the bottom," Doris said. "Do you see it? Then turn it a-a-ll the way around and then you wait for the operator to—"

"In the 0," Tillie muttered, "Nu, let me see. . . ." There was a sudden staccato click-click-click-click.

"Tillie!" Doris screamed.

Lester grabbed the phone. "You're crazy," he said.

"No!" she cried, clutching the receiver convulsively. Lester tried to pry her fingers loose but Doris dug her elbow into the soft part of his belly and clung to the phone. Abruptly Lester let go and Doris brought the mouthpiece to her lips as in a kiss.

"Tillie! Tillie!" she cried. God, have mercy on my soul!

"What?"

"Oh," Doris said, a sigh, "you're still there."

"I'm here, of course I'm here. Where should I be?"

Lester was standing at the closet putting on his jacket. With deliberateness he folded the newspaper, tucked it under his arm and picked up his attaché case.

"Don't do anything until I tell you." Doris scolded Tillie.

"You're a nice girl, darling, a girl like you should be married."

Doris said, "Oh, Tillie."

"No, it's true. You're a wonderful girl. Wait, you'll see. You'll have children yet, your children's children will have children."

Lester was at the front door. "You're crazy," he said before it closed, "you really freaked out."

"From my mouth to God's ear," crooned Tillie. "You hear what I'm saying?"

"Fuck you, Lester," she whispered as the door shut.

". . . you hear?"

"I hear you Tillie, I hear," Doris said, almost whimpering. □

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BEN HOWARD

TWO POEMS

1. R.S.V.P.

To step into nature is to wrap
a cold coat—the one left out
on the porch—around oneself

and go out in the wind for cordwood.
We have no choice. This planet
has never loved us. To leap beyond

oneself: that is the invitation
the bark keeps making. And here we are,
grinding our wedges, keeping our axes sharp.

2. Criminal

Sometimes a man falls away
from the others like a stone. To honor him,
we pretend it's erosion or an accident

of nature. Where he was, the sky
turns a darker hue. We go on plowing snow
from our driveways, keeping

our eyes on the blade.
Sometimes we strike a rock, reminding us
of him. There is no other way we can go.

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janette t. hospital

some have called thee mighty and dreadful

Richard Blau

What fascinated me most when I woke on the Sunday morning was the deviousness, the sheer cunning of the lower levels of my mind. I had felt the steering wheel under my hands, tightened my fingers around it, *shaken* it. So much material evidence, tangible, proof that I was not dreaming. And that in itself astonished me—that within the dream I should have suspected I was dreaming and applied tests.

Having verified that it was not, indisputably *not* a dream, I drove on down the bumpy country road in the crazy yellow car, passing weathered barns, swerving for a bovine jaywalker or two, gulping the honeysuckle air, exultant. I was exceptional, chosen, blessed. I was possibly the only living being to know what I knew.

Then I drove into Sunday morning and the smell of slept-in sheets. Glanced urgently backward across the waking. Held the fading euphoric eyes of the car driver watching me through the windshield with the intensity of the Ancient Mariner, sadder, wiser, fading.

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"Remember Quincy?" asked Joey.

"What's Quincy?"

"Our kitten that got run over."

"I don't remember a kitten. Was I borned then?"

"Yes, but you were too little. I meant Mommy. Remember Quincy, Mommy?"

I said cautiously: "He went to your Grandfather's castle."

Joey flushed angrily. "That was kid stuff. A car ran over Quincy in the parking lot. All his guts squished out. Daddy and I buried him. There was blood all over. You would have throwed up, Angela, but you were too little to understand."

"I bet you cried. I bet you were a big cry-baby," chanted Angela, humiliated not to have participated in the frightful mystery of Quincy's spilled guts.

"So what? He was just a baby kitten. And who cried last night, eh? Who threw up last night?"

Joey left the room abruptly. Angela clung to my arm as though it might disappear and began to weep again.

So Joey's Grandfather was already jettisoned, withering before the cynical scrutiny of the second grade. Omnipotent and benevolent, he had once loomed far larger than the shadowy absent grandfather who lived across the ocean. This one, always accessible to Joey, lived in a castle, host to a fluid and fabulous assortment of guests, possessor of all desired objects—real jewelled swords, a canoe, a rocket ship and a Saint Bernard, among other things. On the day after Quincy's death, Joey had asked for permission to disinter the kitten. It was necessary to take it to the castle, where his Grandfather had a set of magic band-aids that healed all wounds. Desolate for two days after the refusal of his request, contemptuous and furious toward well-meaning explanations, he came down to breakfast on the third morning in a cloud of beatitude. He had visited his Grandfather, and whom did we suppose he had seen skittering playfully across the castle courtyard?

On Monday the children wanted reassurances. Even Joey, who affected to be a little embarrassed by them these days, clung to the goodbye hug. Angela asked: "Will you be here when we come home from school?"

"Of course."

"I'm taking my special ruby-colored glass to school. That piece I found in the garden. I'm going to give it to Lissa."

"I don't expect Melissa will be at school today," I told them.

Only Saturday, after the circus, we had trailed along the border of the city park, Cassandra and I in front, the children in a sticky bliss of cotton candy, giggles and communal reminiscence strung out behind us.

"Remember the clown trying to start up the old car?" Joey was calling back over his shoulder to Angela and Laura. They were walking arm in arm. I remember that, grateful. They might have been quarreling as they often do. Did. Arm in arm, Laura's cheek pink and wet where Angela's cotton candy grazed it.

We stopped in the park to let the children play. Cassandra's voice came lazily from deep in the grass. "Winter seems an impossibility now."

"Like a bad dream," I said, still tasting its aftermath, but breathing in the smell of crushed clover.

"I won't go into a decline like that next winter," she said. "I mean really. I've climbed up to *somewhere* and I won't fall back again. Freedom. It's like the clover. In February you can't believe it will ever come. But it does. It's real."

She grasped a handful of tall grass and clover, caressing it as one might the phallus of a husband or lover. "Look at Laura," she said. Our eyes zigzagged with the unsynchronized swinging of Laura and Angela. "She'll be in school next year. There'll never be another winter like this last one. I won't need to dream of a lover. I'll have *myself* again, and a job, next winter."

I smiled sourly, jealous of her confidence. I'd had myself *ad nauseam* that winter, but neither job nor lover had dropped into my questing life. Still, summer had come for us all indiscriminately, winners and losers.

"I suppose we'll look back on our journals some day and laugh. Or cringe."

"Oh, the journals," she said disdainfully. We were both embarrassed to have been embroiled in such a predictable crisis, such a stock-in-trade of the women's magazines, the death-wish apathy of the snowed-in mother-knotted months.

"I can positively say right now that I intend to cram a lot into the rest of my life."

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"Me too," I said lamely, willing myself to believe it.

"In fact," she expatiated to the clover and the summer, "I would be furious, absolutely furious, if I died now."

Big deal, I thought. All this energy of rage and ambition. If I could tap just a fraction of it.

Later, in the middle of the welter of bubble bath and sticky bodies, the phone rang.

"Can you get that?" I called downstairs and went on lathering Angela's hair. Joey complained that she was taking up too much room, splashed water at her. Angela screamed that she had soap in her eyes.

"Remember the clown in the old car?" I said.

It worked. Laughter.

"This is the way he walked," chuckled Joey, bouncing from buttock to buttock, slithering in the soapy tub. Then Angela was spluttering: "Daddy! Daddy! There was this clown—let *me* tell, Joey—this clown with an old car—Mommy, make Joey be quiet. *I'm* telling daddy. . . ."

"Want to take over?" I glanced back at the doorway where he stood, ashen. "What's wrong?"

Cacophony of splashing, competitive shrieking, high pitched laughter.

"Shut up!" he bellowed.

It was like an obscenity, so unexpected. His words plummeted into the sudden hush.

"There's been an accident. A car. Driver drunk or something. Cassandra. Laura's in hospital, critically injured. Melissa's O.K. I'd better go to John. He was calling from the hospital."

"Cassandra? What about Cassandra?"

"Killed."

A space. Nothing. Something lurching.

Then a quick flurry to get Angela to throw up into the toilet, not the bathtub.

On the late news I saw witnesses interviewed. Fifteen minutes, I figured. Fifteen minutes after we left the playground it had happened. We had walked south, away from the park. They had walked east along the park boundary for several blocks.

"Oh my god, it was horrible. Horrible!" a woman was saying. "Suddenly this car gunned out of nowhere. From somewhere behind me. . . . I don't know. One second I saw the woman and the little girls—then I could only see one little girl. . . . And the car wrapped around a tree."

A grotesque death, the announcer explained. Cassandra's body had been dragged fifty yards to be mashed between car and tree. Melissa, evidently, had received only a glancing blow. Laura's body had ricocheted off the car and crumpled into the grass.

The children had wanted to sleep in the same room, had required crooning and lullabies till they fell asleep. Angela's body shuddered in the grip of dreams. The glaring eye of the night light watched, unwinking.

There had been another phone call from the hospital where they were waiting out the hours of Laura's surgery. There were ruptured organs. She would probably die.

I sat in the rocker in the children's room, afraid to leave them. It seemed very cold, I kept shivering. I thought about the clover that might still be visibly crushed from Cassandra's hands. I thought about the fifty yards. Then I remembered something else. That party, a month ago, where someone had been discussing Kübler-Ross—the cases of people who had been clinically dead for a number of minutes, who later knew how many electrocardiac shocks their 'dead' bodies had received, who recalled being outside their bodies, watching, having a sense of urgency about getting back.

It was exciting grist for discussion, more enthralling than chess, until suddenly Cassandra spoke with the intensity of someone who has managed to rip off a gag in the last second before suffocation. Staccato rushes of sound.

"What is the *point* of this conversation? Is it to make us all terrified of death? To make us sweat for the rest of our lives, wondering what will happen *after*? What we will *know*?"

There were murmurs, coughing, disavowals. That fluid instinct that fills up social abysses, blurs their edges. Moments later, drained and trembling slightly, Cassandra was blushing, apologetic, embarrassed by her outburst.

I would be furious, absolutely furious, if I died now. Those fifty yards. Were they intense with knowledge, recognizing death, seeing the distorted bundle of Laura, reaching for the bereft Melissa? Knowing, knowing, raging. Yes, that is what I fear, that is what claws at my gut, crams my throat with vomit. She died angry. She is still angry.

I shiver. I think of Laura's bedside. She is there, angry, impotent, anguished. This is irrational. I am gagging on something, the acrid taste of guilt, responsibility. No, this is not coherent, not a time for clear perspectives. But if we had lain in the clover another five minutes. Or five minutes less. If I had invited them back to our house. If I had only tilted time a few minutes to one side or the other. This is shock. Of course I am not responsible. Life is random, brutally indifferent. The clover. Fifteen minutes. Fifty yards.

How can I not be responsible?

I was lying in a large hospital ward. It was segregated, no visitors allowed. Only the terminally ill came there. They permitted us our last little pleasures, our self-indulgences.

We could go downstairs, below ground level, to the library. It was a mezzanine floor, with thick opaque glass catwalks threading between the stacks. Just like the library I worked in once. I spent most of my time down there. It was peaceful, quiet, blissful, every conceivable book available.

Readers milled around, brushed one another silently, smiled, all rather indistinguishable in loose white hospital gowns. The other ones, the gray ones, never took their own books from the shelves. Someone placed them open and waiting on their carrels.

The gray ones moved lightly, gracefully. When they looked up, someone, one of us, would turn the page.

"Why do you never fetch your own books, or turn your own pages?" I asked one.

"We are from downstairs," the gray one answered.

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"Downstairs?"

"After you leave the ward you go downstairs, below the library."

"After you leave the ward?" I repeated it slowly. I reached out to touch.

There was nothing. Just so, I recalled, had Dante tried to clasp Virgil. "What is it like, downstairs?"

"It is . . . a little cold, but very peaceful. You will like it. We can come up here to the library any time we want. Only we have to depend on one of you to take down the books."

"Do you know many people down there?"

"Of course."

"Do you know. . .? Is there someone named Cassandra?"

"Ah yes, Cassandra. She just arrived. She will be sleeping, it will be a few days before she can come up here and talk to you. But you can visit her now."

The gray one led me down a narrow iron staircase. Downstairs it was chilly, like a wine cellar. There were neat rows of stacks, with large file drawers instead of books. The gray one pulled out a drawer and I saw Cassandra, in repose, not at all damaged, an ice princess of a beauty to make princes rash with thorn thickets.

At a party once someone had said to me: "You two are unnerving, you know. I mean, one expects philosophers' wives to be dowdy, somehow. But look at you! And Cassandra! My god!"

"I'll tell you that one later, in the library," I said to the sleeping Cassandra.

But I never saw her in the library. The impossible happened, I got better. It was a problem, no one had ever been released from the ward before, except to go downstairs. They made me promise not to tell.

I drove away in a little yellow sports car, delirious with life. Nothing to be scared about ever. Books, peace, no pain, no terror. God, what luck, to be perhaps the only human being who actually knew. . . . But if it should be only a dream? It wasn't a dream. I could smell lilacs and honeysuckle, I could feel the wheel, solid and smooth, under my hands. The leather upholstery had an embossed textured grain, tactile.

"Melissa *was* at school," Angela told me.

Joey was running a fever at bedtime.

"Do you think Cassandra was maybe wicked?" he asked me privately.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"I mean, do you think maybe she was a robber? Or maybe killed someone? Or maybe did dreadful things no one knew about, only Melissa?"

"Joey! Of course not! Cassandra was killed by a crazy car driver. Did you think she was being punished for something?"

"No." Blankly. "But Melissa doesn't love her. I think she must have hated her. I think she's glad she's dead."

"Did Melissa tell you that?"

"No."

"What makes you think such a thing?"

He burst into tears, burrowing into my arms.

"She was *playing* at recess. She was *laughing*. Like nothing happened."

The words became tangled and lost in body shaking sobs.

On Monday night, John told us about her will. All the specifics. She had set them down legally, years ago. No embalming, no open casket, a plain pine coffin. Does everyone do that, make arrangements? At our age? It had never occurred to me. No viewing—my god, in the circumstances . . ..

There were too many imponderables. *I would be furious* . . . Fifteen minutes. Perhaps after any death it happens, retrospective significance. If I died tomorrow, would they say: she read Plath and Sexton—strange! But the outburst at the party? The will? Did she know? Did she make it happen? What is a coincidence?

On Tuesday the funeral was some sort of catharsis, of exhaustion if nothing else.

"Mommy, why are you shaking?" Angela asked me at the cemetery.

I held a hand of each child, their faces were red and swollen, they shivered. But they had chosen to come, yes, they belonged, had a right.

"I'm not. I'm just sad. I'm missing her. I'm worrying about Laura and Melissa and John," I whispered, trembling, smelling clover, tasting earth.

"Does she *feel* that? Does she know they're shovelling dirt?" Joey asked.

"No. It's like when you're asleep. Nothing. It's just like being nothing."

"I have nightmares," he said uncertainly.

Ah, but in that sleep of death, what dreams may come!

"Not when you're dead. No dreams. Never. Nothing."

They were reassured.

I have watched people since, carefully, with calculating assessing eye. The old people next door, they must feel it coming. Never a sign, never a tremor.

"Another friend of mine passed away last week," the old lady tells me. I watch like a hawk. "We were at school together." She sighs and smiles. "Ah well, we're all getting on." She says it like a benediction.

Perhaps it has unhinged me. Am I a coward, simply that? I admit nothing. No one admits anything. Perhaps after all everyone has a closet theology, a resurrection trump. Let them have their Grandfather's castles, whatever helps.

Nothing helps me. I feel the weight of damp black clay pressing on her, on me. These are my night thoughts, shameful. If I could only stop feeling Cassandra's rage. Beside Laura, white, fragile, tented, machine-monitored, I think: she is raging with grief. By Melissa, lost and pensive, I think: she is straining against the bonds of her absence, furious.

If I could only be certain it was nothingness. No knowledge. No dreams. I walk around with the taste of earth sour on my tongue, growing my cancer of fear, my terminal illness. □

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Lyn Lifshin

THREE POEMS

from "Remember the Ladies"

3

women who wouldnt
till they married

but the house was so
cold snow blowing
in thru the daubing
like the cry of starving
wolves and the branches

knocking oiled paper
like hands crawled

under the covers
in their clothes
kept a board be
tween them thought

of a thigh maybe
warm skin flung
over the sheets
smelling of skin
and hair next

morning pulled on
wool and heavy leather

before lugging water
out for the cows
breath steaming like
fog in the willows

16

obstetric case with
tools of wood brass
and leather steel

and wool midwives
walked thru the
acorns pushing
on sleds thru the
snow as the wind
was howling

snow blowing thru
oil cloth in windows

a woman rolling her
head in down pillows
trying to believe in
4 months she'll be
gathering violets

a daughter in a basket
near the bed sees the
forceps covered with
gauze and greased with
hogs lard this huge dark
metal seems too big
to go between any legs

27

rachelle weeping painting 1772

some mothers lived to
bury all their children

charles peale his baby
dying of small pox
painted the child
quiet as stone
her arms tied with
a satin ribbon
at her side

lace covered pillow
the sheets over the
bottom of her legs
like a little orange
on a pillow

years later he painted
the mother in tears
touching her own skin

resting at the
edge of the bed
like it was a
table she was
studying her home
work on

the picture hung years
in the painter's house
covered by a curtain

with the sign "Before you
draw this curtain consider
whether you will
offend a mother or father
who has lost a child"

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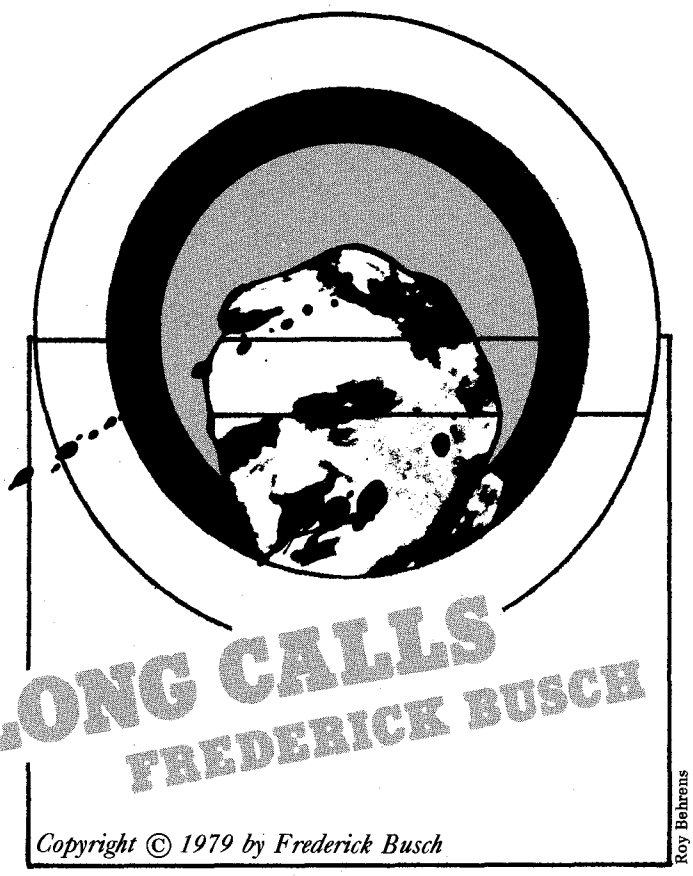
When Schiff received the assignment and had to leave town, he telephoned some people to say good-bye. They said the same. The last call was to his former wife. He said good-bye to Noah, his son, who was six. Noah put Schiff's former wife back on, but they had used their farewells up, and there was nothing to do but what they did: talked low, then disconnected.

He flew from New York to Chicago, from Chicago to a college town where a bookstore called Greenspan's didn't pay its bills. On behalf of the Brothers Vogel, the law firm that employed his former wife, Schiff was to administer the inventory and mount a kind of watch while the bankruptcy suit began. He had done worse.

His motel room was a motel room. On the damage-proof surface of the bedside table was a small keyboard that turned the TV on and off. And there were his canvas suitcases, and his old BOAC flight bag containing books and cassettes and his little recorder. And, standing exhausted at the bathroom mirror, tall and wet-eyed, bald and bearded, was Schiff: former father, former husband, former older brother, once more told to be in charge.

From the motel by rented car, through the grid of streets that surrounded the school, to Greenspan's, a sea of printed paper with a four-walled desk that was an island in the center of the store. On the island, behind the cash register, a terribly pale man with red eyelids, yellow-white hair, a joint in his mouth. From speakers on the walls, Kiki Dee crying her love for music, the bass reverberating through the spines of the books.

A short fat boy in farmer's overalls and lumber jacket carried a book to the desk. His face was red, and he



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Roy Behrens

snorted a laugh as he handed money to the stoned man. The albino said, "Hey, let's see, what's it say—five? *Five?* Yeah, but the book only says two. Right? That say two? You giving me five, right? So—what, you want me to make you change. Right?"

Stacks, along the floor near the walls, of old quarterlies. Unlabeled shelves along the walls, going from A in fiction to R, then lapsing into philosophy. Around the corner, on the far wall, two rows of books about women.

A sly smile moved across the albino's face and he waggled his white eyebrows. "Okay," he said, "okay. I'll make—I'll make you change into a Big *Mac!*" He giggled and the fat boy pushed the five-dollar bill across the counter. The albino said, "You really want me to do it, right? Aw-*right.* Here we *go.*"

A young man browsing beyond the island. Boxes of bright periodicals with naked women on the covers. A wall of books called *She Did It for Everyone* and *Bondage Boy.* In an alcove opposite the desk, film and theater books, a wall of poetry, books about homosexual love. The music changing to Sly, and a song about the danger of love and amphetamines. Schiff wiped his hands against his clothes: the dust on the wood of the store, on its books, in its air, the smell of very old salad dressing and slowly leaking natural gas.

The albino leaned over the cash register. He pushed a button with one finger, then looked at the book, at the money, at the fat blushing boy, and then pushed another button. He sat back, shifted on his stool, nodded, leaned to the register again, said, "Now we do a ze-ro. *Choong.*" He pushed another key, nodded, and leaned in. "Now we do a tax thing—*choong.*" He leaned back, licked his lips, and said, "Now we push this big mother over *here,*" and he pushed. The bell rang, the drawer slid out, and white cards in the register window stood up to say $14.05 TX. Schiff turned back to the books.

From a gray and brown curtain in the farthest end of the alcove came a tall man with long curling uncombed black hair who wore dungarees and a work shirt and boots that banged on the floor. A filtered cigarette in the corner of his mouth made him squint and tear from the right eye. He walked to the cash register island and made change, slapped it wordlessly onto the table beside the paperback book. Turning from the fat boy he said to the albino in a deep voice, "You gotta build my confidence, you know? You're not making me confident you can handle the job. Understand?"

The fat boy left with his book, the music changed again, someone whose voice Schiff couldn't recognize told him to seek comfort in a woman who could hold her whiskey and care for his need. The albino climbed down through a small door in the back of the island and walked past Schiff through the curtain, and the man with the cigarette in his mouth seated himself behind the cash register. Schiff walked over to the island and stood before him as the man smoked, squinting and watering from his right eye, and reading a Des Moines paper.

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"Excuse me?" Schiff said.

The man looked up, squinted at Schiff with a lizard's ungenerous eye. He waited.

Schiff said, "I'm from Vogel? In New York?"

The man looked at Schiff; one eye squinted, the other eye blinked. His mouth made no expression, simply held the cigarette in place. Then emotion grew around the long beaked nose, the high cheekbones, long jaw: a forced belligerent calm. Schiff was someone's enemy again.

The man said nothing, stepped through the back of the island, and walked in heavy boots through the curtain. A few minutes later he was back with a short, stocky man dressed in brown corduroy trousers and brown buckskin shirt whose hair was almost the color of his outfit and was artfully whorled over his head to hide the baldness. The short man squinted, but with no cigarette in his mouth, and Schiff thought at first that he smiled. He didn't. He said, loudly, against the music, "You the bankruptcy guy from New York? You here to fuck us over and sell us out?"

Schiff said, "I'm the bankruptcy guy. Hey—it's a job. All right?"

The short one said, "Eichmann said that too, Mr. Bankruptcy. Everybody who killed the Jews said that. You're just obeying your orders, right?"

The tall one nodded and spat his cigarette butt onto the floor and let the filter burn there. Schiff stepped on it. "Sure," the tall one said. "Hey: Fuck you. How's that?"

The short one said, "You want to burn these books or what? You want us to make a bonfire and burn the books for you? You know how long we been serving the people in this community who love *books*?"

Schiff said, "I'm sorry I stepped on your cigarette. I thought you were finished with it."

The short one said, "That was his cigarette. *I'm* talking to you. *I'm* the one, Mr. Bankruptcy. I think I hate you, you know that?"

"Listen," Schiff said, "I'll come back tomorrow and maybe you can show me the accounts and I can start the inventory. I can check the receipts tomorrow."

"You gonna check our receipts?" the tall one said. "That's nice." His voice was deep and getting louder with rage. "You gonna give us an allowance every Friday?"

Schiff put his hands in his pockets. He moved his foot away from the cigarette butt. "Which one of you is Mr. Greenspan?" he asked them.

The short one said, "We're both Mr. Greenspan. Tough luck, huh? You gotta do us *both*."

"I don't want to do anyone," Schiff said. "I'm making money so I can pay my child-support, and I'm sorry about your store. You deserve your store. It even *looks* like you. But I'm coming back tomorrow. I'll be here. I'll be wearing my storm trooper boots."

Schiff made his exit by walking into an iron revolving rack of paperback books. He rebounded, went out into the crowed dusk of a university town. After some errant turns, he got back to the Treetop Motel—not a tree in sight, only a bright shopping mall across a four-lane arterial highway—and, after stopping at the chicken restaurant next door, he went into his room and gnawed at wings and watched a program about radiation leaks.

Later, he filled the tub and carried in the Panasonic, put a cassette on—Schubert's *Moments Musicaux*—and slid in, wincing, under the hot water, lay still. He drew his knees up because the tub was too small and then he stretched his legs out, his feet on the wall straddling the faucets. He lay like that, uncomfortably, and then closed his eyes anyway and let the music do what it did for him—allowed him to leak away.

The next morning, the short one, still in buckskins, was sitting in the little island at Greenspan's. He ate poundcake set out on waxed paper in slices like playing cards. He wrinkled his forehead as Schiff came in, then nodded, sipped coffee from a carton, pointed to the cake. Schiff shook his head and stood before the man, waiting to see what, as occupying fascist force, Schiff could expect in the way of resistance. The music wasn't on, and that made it easier. Then the short one made it easier still. He said, "You Jewish?"

"Why?"

"You know, like the joke—you *look* Jewish."

"Okay."

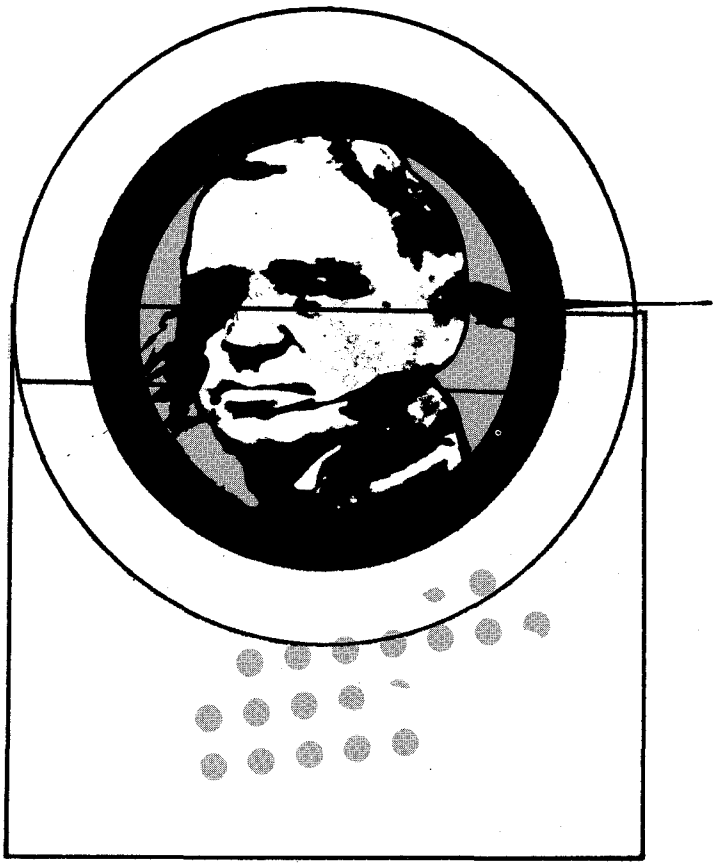
"You're a Jew, right?"

"Yeah. Right. So what?"

"So I said some things about Jews and Germans yesterday. Very far out of line, all right? Easy-mouth. Everybody calls everybody a Nazi if they don't like them, right? And if they feel a little paranoid, they call themselves Jews. Right?"

Schiff nodded.

"It so happens," the man said, "that the Greenspan boys ain't Jews. We're German Lutherans, right? And



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you're a Jew, right? So you come in here to do what you're supposed to do—I *hate* this, I want you to know I *hate* all this—and the German calls himself a Jew and he calls the Jew a Nazi, which is, uhm"—he put the yellow cake in his mouth and chewed it into a paste which flecked his tougue as he spoke again—"anyway, *that* ain't fair. So listen. Listen: We got a lawyer here, and he's gonna try and shove this involuntary bankruptcy up this New York lawyer's nose—what's his name?"

"Vogel. The Brothers Vogel."

"They Germans or Jews?"

"Both, I think."

"Yeah? That's far out. So listen, I think maybe we'll win, but what the hell. We split for the coast, we get some warm weather and some sun, right? We change the name to something very mellow, like Joe and Gordy Sweetstuff—you like that? We open a new line of credit, which is too easy to do, and meantime you do us a free inventory."

His face looked the same as it had the day before, when he'd squinted against no smoke and hated Schiff for a Jew-killer. Schiff nodded at the man and said it was his pleasure.

"I don't know what the hell we can *do* with an inventory," the man said. "We got a mess here. When you get done, we'll have a mess except with numbers attached to it. You know? Now listen: Go ahead. Just don't talk to my brother too much. Joseph? Joe, he's got a hair up his ass about you. He's not a polite guy. No, you're gonna find out he's a hot-shit *person*. I mean, that aspect's cool. But his manners really suck. It's a defense mechanism." Greenspan smiled and his eyes crinkled again. Schiff held his hand out between them, as a barrier, and Greenspan reached out of his island and put a cold dry little hand in Schiff's and squeezed back.

That was his first day on the job. Gordy, the shorter brother, gave him a clipboard and a sheet of legal paper and a brown bag filled with invoices dating back several months. Schiff borrowed a felt-tip pen from him and began to compare inventory to actual stock. He soon gave up, since it was clear that the invoices were incomplete. He called New York, collect, asked a junior partner at the Brothers Vogel—she was Schiff's wife—to send their records of billings to Greenspan's, and then Schiff started to count stock, listing by category—fiction, poetry, philosophy, and so on—because it was easy to do. He listed within those categories by author or editor alphabetically. Eudora Welty was on the third shelf from the bottom near the door at the front of the store—two Modern Library *Selected Stories*. Next to them was one copy of a Signet Katherine Anne Porter collected stories; he found out, after ten minutes of asking questions, then searching on his own, that they were together because Katherine Anne Porter had written the introduction to the Welty *Selected Stories*. An hour later Schiff found Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* next to the pornographic paperbacks on an unstained wooden shelf on the front of which, in pencil, was printed MARRIAGE. Gordy was able to tell him where it was when Schiff asked for more Welty because, Gordy said, he knew the shop's geography by heart. Schiff decided he'd find Welty's *Losing Battles* in the section on war; but when Schiff could not find such a section, Gordy proudly told him that he and Joe didn't believe in war.

Schiff worked, and Gordy turned the radio up louder. Having decided to do the alphabet at random, Schiff was at the Zs when Joe came in, about 11:45. Joe Greenspan wore the same clothes and wore his cigarette the same way, and instead of talking to his brother or to Schiff, he stood at the door and stared at Schiff as he worked. Schiff waited for the man to speak. He didn't. He stared at Schiff and rubbed his flat belly and slowly pushed his palm through the air, in Schiff's direction and down, dismissing him from the earth. Then Joe walked through to the back room, came out with a khaki book bag, and left. Gordy Greenspan smiled what might have been his smile. Schiff listened to Judy Collins sing a song about cooking with honey.

After lunch the albino kid, not stoned, came in and Gordy left, saying he might not come back for the weekend, and if Joe didn't return the albino was to lock up.

Schiff said, "Gordy, I think I'm supposed to have a key."

Gordy smiled his possible smile and bounced on the balls of his little feet. "You're a pistol," he said. He smiled more broadly and wiped his mouth as if he still were eating. "Okay. In the back, back there. One of you guys lock up if we're gone till Monday. I don't care if you close it early, late, whatever. Everybody take care of everything, right?"

And after Gordy Greenspan had left and the albino had settled down—the register drawer open so he didn't have to solve the mysteries of the keyboard to make change—the sour spice smell of marijuana now settling onto the dust and the hard surface of the music, Schiff went into the alcove and through the curtain into the back room.

There was an aluminum folding cot on one wall, and photographs were pasted everywhere—every poet he'd heard of, and some fiction writers, and people who had written about the release of psychic energy and sexual tension. The wall at the back was taken up by a soot-streaked stove and a small refrigerator. Here the smell of gas was violent and threatening. A large carton on the floor in front of the cot held foreign magazines that specialized in vulvas, and on top of the magazines was a length of chain to which were attached several keys. One had a piece of tape on it labeled STORE, and Schiff removed it and went back into the shop to tell the albino he was leaving.

After lunch in a bar crowded with students, Schiff grew tired of thinking he was old, so he went back to the car and drove to the motel. He watched two giants punch themselves into exhaustion. He watched a program about nature. He watched news: Rath's reported hogs up, and beans appeared to be holding their own. First Avenue in Cedar Rapids was closed by an explosive fire. The President was confident. Schiff went out for hamburgers. He returned to watch a film about American Indian potters and then a longer film about John Wayne's triumph over other American Indians. News came on at ten o'clock in the Midwest, while the people Schiff knew in New York

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still were waiting for it, or were listening to blues piano at the Cookery, or were in a bedroom being useful to one another.

He went to bed after putting a cassette of Boccherini on the machine. It began with the Quintet No. 2 in C Major for guitar and strings, and Schiff fell into it and through it at once, floated into Gordy Greenspan, his brother, the dust in the store and the crazy listings. Schiff thought of how, when he was married, he would hide within the cycles of their days, silently washing dishes, or coming back from a free-lance assignment, or bathing their child, or sitting with an article in the *Times* on the Giants' need for linemen. He would not speak and still would not, and soon he would smell shampoo and hear the sounds of cloth against her skin, which meant that the day was over again. And still he would speak in the coldest language only, the vocabulary of crossed legs or of scratchings at the neck. Or the sigh of wind inside the body that arrives outside as if from a great distance. And then the baby would murmur in its room, an innocent sound without meaning or need, and Schiff would be up from the chair and chattering—*found*—and would be surprised that no one in that apartment wanted his company, or wished to praise his attentions to the very young. He slept alone, such nights.

The tape recorder clicked to a halt, and he reached in darkness to turn the cassette onto its other side for the Quintet in E. The music marched and he went with it, past his wife and son, thinking of his brother, and here he goes, a guerrilla stealing into his brother's room more than thirty years ago. He slides the door of his closet back on its silent track, stands among the innocent smells of small shirts and trousers, closes himself in, and waits. Here comes his brother, seven years younger than Schiff, underweight, serious, awed by his older brother's height and heft, bewildered by his lack of love or comprehension of a little brother's needs. Schiff waits until it is absolutely time. He slowly slides the door wide and makes no sound. He waits. The little brother's body moves beneath the secret of Schiff's presence. Still silent, his face drawn tight to hide his teeth, a gangster's mask, Schiff is waiting until the little brother finally *knows* he's there. He turns to see the stranger's face on the edge of his life, and he weeps. Schiff smiles with his mouth open wide.

We hope you have enjoyed this recording, said no one in an official voice, *which has been programmed to reduce program interruption for your continuous listening pleasure.* Then there was silence as the empty length of tape, left for his continuous listening pleasure, moved on, then halted with a click. Schiff was sitting in bed and feeling his chest pound, was wiping at his mouth, making himself understand that there was too little tape left for more music.

On Sunday he went in for a while and worked at Greenspan's, enjoying the job. He was through M and almost finished with L. He did another couple of titles and then, carrying the clipboard with him, turning off the few lights he'd been using, went into the dark cold gassy back room. It was like being underground, surrounded by stone and pools of black icy water. Lichen on the walls. Tiny white things moving slowly under rocks. He turned on a desk lamp attached to a metal cabinet above the stove. Lay on the cot in intense light. Let his legs go limp. Carried a wad of glossy magazines onto his chest and read them. Looked at thighs and crotches and great soft breasts with irritated nipples. And soon he was massaging his groin. And soon his fly was open. And soon, slowly, with lazy pleasure and no mind, he was holding and stroking and rasping himself. And soon, before a two-page photo of a fat girl sucking her own glistening finger as her membranes gleamed at him, Schiff released his sperm in gusts across his knees to the floor and the tops of his shoes. He slowly, sweatily wiped himself, and then his shoes, with a soiled blanket. He waited in half sleep until he was soft. He went back to the hotel and watched Julius Erving fly through the Chicago Bulls like a giant brown bird, again and again, to *slam* the ball through the hoop in vengeance for unnamed offenses.

On Monday Schiff worked. The usual flow of customers and the usual music. Gordy stayed away and Joe sat at the island, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes which he held in his mouth except when he drank. He looked at Schiff with scorn and Schiff tried not to look back. After lunch, when the albino hadn't come in, Joe returned from the back room, smelling of canned ravioli, and stood at Schiff's side, too close, while Schiff worked. He said, "Hey. Hey. Shithead, hey. You know what we're tryin' to *do* in here?"

Schiff didn't turn around. He said, "No."

Joe said, "Yeah. That don't surprise me, you know that?"

Schiff said, "Right. Right, Joe."

"You're *humoring* me? Hey! *You're* humoring *me?*"

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Schiff clipped the sheets tighter into the clipboard and put the pen in his pocket and said, "Bye, Joe. Have a nice night."

"That might've been your last chance, stupid."

But Schiff went past him and out.

That night, in the motel room and in darkness, a thousand miles from home but really farther, thinking of the people he had told good-bye, Schiff heard Joe at the door. He slapped it, then thumped hard, calling, "Hey! Hey, Bankruptcy! You wanna smoke some dope? You wanna make peace?"

Schiff turned on the TV set but kept the sound off.

Joe called, "Yeah, okay. But I think this was the last chance, you know?"

Schiff watched a rerun of *Star Trek* in the darkness and silence, and after a while Joe went away. He continued to watch the space ship's crewmen disappear from their craft into tingling dotted lines, then reappear, filling their outlines again, in a barren world where there were awful creatures who meant the crewmen no good.

He was awakened again, he didn't know how much later, but he had seen American bombers and rippling flags on three channels before he'd fallen asleep. He seized the phone, a ripe new layer of sweat over his body—shins even and even the insides of his forearms—and he tried to sound calm, as if he were being graded for courage. He accepted the long-distance call, acknowledging who he was and then saying hello to his former wife.

He asked if Noah was all right. She assured him Noah was fine. She asked after his inventory work. He said fine. But then they got to business because she wanted to. He didn't care yet; he still savored Noah's safety. She had gone to check his mail, she said. He said nothing. She had thought that burglars shouldn't have clues—uncollected mail was a clue for crooks, she told him, in her business tones—and there was the Dartmouth alumni magazine. Reading it to see if his name was mentioned, she had found no catalog of his recent minor accomplishments. But she had seen his brother's name listed. With appropriate sorrow expressed by the class of '64. He was *dead*, she told Schiff. The line was silent for seconds. Then: Why hadn't Schiff *told* her? Had he known? Was it true? What could he *do?*

Schiff said that they had grown so estranged, his brother *would,* Schiff thought, neglect to tell him of his death.

She didn't think Schiff was funny. She wanted to know how Schiff felt.

Schiff didn't know. Then he did: "I feel like an orphan," he said. "Cheated. The bastard."

He thanked her and told her he would be in touch.

Sure, she said, wouldn't he just.

"Noah's all right?" he asked again.

She said, "He doesn't know."

"It wouldn't make any difference, I guess. I'll call you."

She said, "You won't call me back. You never call me back. You don't know *how* to call me back."

Then hung up. He sat on the bed, then went to his flight bag for his notebook of names and addresses. He set out the clipboard of inventoried titles, flipped back pages of the long legal pad until he had a clean sheet ready and the clipboard set by the phone. He dialed for an outside line, reached an operator, and started to call across the country, to verify his brother's dying.

First his brother's number in San Diego. No answer.

Then the San Diego night supervisor. Confirmation that the number worked. Schiff asked how long it would take to disconnect a dead man's phone. The operator said probably a month or three weeks after the last bill was due.

Then Schiff's local operator said, "Are you all right, honey?" When he told her why he wasn't, she said, "Make sure you're sitting down. Are you sitting down?"

Schiff's operator called the central police station in San Diego. Giving his brother's address, she learned which local station might have responded if Schiff's brother had fallen over from a charge of drugs too bright and hard for his body, or been stabbed on the sidewalk near his loft. She worked through exchanges and raised a sergeant near his brother's address. Schiff told the sergeant how he'd learned of his brother's death, and when he thought it might have taken place. Schiff told the sergeant he was guessing. The sergeant sighed into the phone. Schiff gave him the name and address and the sergeant went away to check, returned with no information, told Schiff he would send a car to the loft, instructed him to call back in half an hour. Meanwhile, the sergeant said, did Schiff want to make more calls? Schiff did, and the sergeant gave him the name of the hospital into whose emergency room his brother might have been brought. "If he was mugged, you know, or DOA," the sergeant said.

Schiff said, "That means dead on arrival?"

So his operator, still on the line, obtained and called the number for Metropolitan Hospital's emergency room. Schiff spoke to a nurse who gave him over to an orderly who, with great calmness and almost tender care, went back through records, finding no reference to Schiff's brother. Schiff thought of himself in the closet in his brother's room, sliding the door back slowly, no expression on his face.

"But that doesn't mean he didn't die," the orderly said. "It just means he didn't die *here.* He might have died on the street and been brought into the medical examiner's office DOA."

"That means dead on arrival," Schiff said. "Am I right?"

The orderly gave Schiff the medical examiner's number—the operator cut in to say, "I have that, sir"—and they went again through the dancing high-sung notes of the long-distance wire.

A man in the medical examiner's office was bored by Schiff's story, though not cruel—he was only conducting his business. He went back through records, further back, then said Schiff's name aloud and spelled it to Schiff. Schiff said, "Yes." The man spelled it again. Schiff said, "Yes."

Then the man said, "No, this one's too young. Your brother's thirty-two? No. This one's twenty-eight."

"It's pretty close, though," Schiff said.

"Your brother a Negro?"

He wouldn't tell me if he was.

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Or: Not the last time I looked, but that was so long ago.
Or: Quite possibly, by now.

Schiff said, "No, I have a Caucasian brother."

"You're clear as far as I can see. This guy was black."

"Thank you," Schiff said.

"Thank *him*," the man said.

Schiff thought of his wife on the floor of their living room—his former wife—with Noah leaning against her drawn-up knees, her hand on his hair and the back of his neck, reading him the story, again, of Arthur Cluck, and of how Arthur Cluck disappeared from his loving mother hen, and how Ralph the Owl, barnyard detective, found Arthur Cluck and brought him home. Schiff's wife's low voice, telling about losses.

His operator asked if he was all right, and Schiff told her he was, then gave her numbers: the art school where his brother had taught—still taught? once taught?—part-time; the name of his brother's chairman; the number of a woman whom his brother had claimed once to love. Schiff's toes felt cold on the motel carpet, and clamping the phone to his shoulder with his head, he wrapped a blanket around his body. He felt tender toward himself.

The chairman did not answer. The woman wasn't home and the man who answered didn't know when she would be; the man said he didn't care. The operator said this was important. The man said he still didn't care. The watchman at the art school said no one was there and Schiff should *know* that no one was there.

So Schiff thanked the operator, told her how fine she'd been, told her of his gratitude—his voice began to wobble, then—and said he'd try the numbers later on. He hung up.

He wanted food. He had to have food, so he dressed and went down the corridor to the vending machines. With all his change he bought four Mars bars, went back to sit on the bed, dropping wrappers on the carpet, filling himself with sweetness. He lay on the bed, turned on the remote-control switch, worked through the channels, found glaring whiteness and the high hum of empty air, turned the set off, closed his eyes. He didn't sleep, but lay there, and lay there, and then he rolled and sat up, planted his feet on the carpet again. He said to the room, "My brother's dead. My brother is dead. My brother is dead."

He answered: "You should have thought of that before." But he didn't understand what he meant. He picked up the phone and dialed the number in San Diego at four in the morning and listened to the telephone ring.

Nothing. Schiff hung up. The phone rang, and Schiff ripped it from the cradle: "Hello? *Hello?*"

"This is the operator, honey. Can I get any more numbers for you? Did you find anything out?"

Schiff said, "Oh. Oh. You're wonderful, you know that?" He was crying, but he tried to sound businesslike, and said, "Thank you, no thank you, it'll be fine, thank you very much, thank you."

And then the phone did not ring, and he watched it, and then dialed to San Diego again, and listened to it ring for no one in California, and then he hung up to wait.

He rewound the Boccherini, and let it play.

He dialed the number in San Diego.

His brother answered at once: "Yeah?"

"Hey," Schiff said, tightening his throat and eyes. "Hey, it's me."

There was a new silence—the music of estrangement—and then his brother said, "Hey, hey, man. What's up?" What's up: What is the business we have to transact.

"I heard you were dead," Schiff said.

"Who told you that? Are they right?" Schiff's brother giggled, then was silent, then barked a laugh, and said "Oh, wow. Oh, *wow*. What a mess. What a—"

"Me?" Schiff said, with the innocence of begged love.

"I was getting those, you know, alumni letters? You know: We need a hundred million dollars by next week, so please send all your money? I got so goddamn tired of getting all that junk—"

"*You* did it??"

"What?"

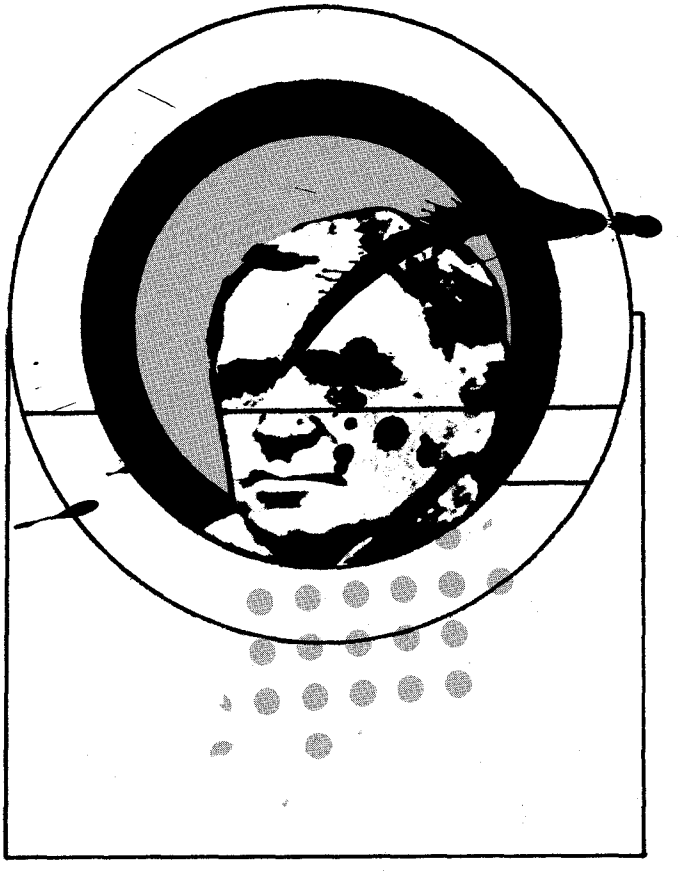
"No, tell me, you go ahead."

"I wrote them this letter from my widow, see? I told them I died—my husband, who was me. I told them it really got me upset—the widow—to keep getting these letters to him. *Me*. Him. You know?"

Schiff tried to whistle and couldn't. "Got it. Right. Right. Listen—I made about fifty dollars' worth of calls. I believed it. See, I thought you were *dead*. I called the cops near you, and—Jesus! I forgot to call the cops back!"

"Maybe you didn't miss me as much as you thought."

"No," Schiff said, "I was calling hospitals and emergency rooms and the medical examiner to find out if you



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got DOA'd, that's dead on arrival. I called your chairman. I called all your friends I ever heard of."

"You really tracked me down, huh?"

Schiff's brother's voice sounded to Schiff like Schiff's.

His brother said, "Well, you know what to do in emergencies at least, don't you?"

"Yeah, I guess I'm good at that."

They let the line stay silent for a long time.

"I hope you see the humor in all this," his brother said.

"Well."

"It sounds like you're having a hard time seeing the humor in all this."

Schiff held onto the receiver with both hands and heard their silence.

"Well," Schiff said, his voice pitching. "Well, maybe I will. Maybe next week or something. I believed it."

Their silence again, and then, as if he'd suddenly got very busy, Schiff's brother said, "Well, I tell you what. Why don't you drop me a postcard or something when you see how all this is kind of funny. All right? How's that?"

Schiff stood up, and all his words for anger and apology came to the back of his teeth and died there. He swallowed them. He said, "All right. All right. All right. I'm glad you're alive." He waited to say something better for himself, and maybe even for his brother, but his brother disconnected and Schiff put his phone down too.

The Boccherini went on for a little while, and then the room was still. Schiff sat on the bed, cross-legged, cold. He picked up the telephone and dialed his wife's number, but hung up. He walked around the room, lay down in bed, and slept.

He woke, went back to sleep, woke an hour later in light and told himself what had happened. He drove downtown to work.

Melissa Manchester sang "Midnight Blue." Joe sat in the island, his cigarette in place, his hands in his lap, and anger, as ever, on his face. The smell of gas was harsher this morning, and there seemed to be more magazines piled in the dirty-books section, and a box of what looked like old bedclothes. Schiff thought of his recently invested sperm. Gordy came from the back room, crinkled his face in what might have been a smile, and said, "Okay."

Joe nodded back. Gordy went out of the store and Joe beckoned Schiff to the island. Schiff went, carrying the clipboard. "I came to see you, Bankruptcy."

"I heard you, Joe. I was trying to stay alone last night. And some things came up. Maybe I would have called you, but some things came up."

"I knew you were there." He squinted through his smoke. Schiff wiped at his face because the gas smell was heavier. "That was it, pal, last night. You wouldn't've called me."

Schiff said, "No." He turned around and went to the section of poetry books in the alcove near the curtain. The gas was dense there and Schiff turned to tell him, but Joe was gone. Schiff went back to the island and saw that the store was empty. The sign that hung in the glass door said OPEN. But that was the side facing Schiff. He went to the alcove and through the curtain and smelled the gas leaking into the store from the stove. He heard it hiss from all four open unlit burners, and from the oven, a great black mouth that gaped at his own.

He shut the burners off and went back to the far side of the shop where dirty smoke made Schiff sneeze in shrieks. The rags that Joe had lit before leaving had caught onto some silky sex magazines, and Schiff saw the filter of Joe's cigarette nested in burning pages. He kicked the box along the floor before it could light a shelf of books and, as the Greenspans had planned, build up heat enough to ignite the leaking gas and blow the books away, their debts away, and their bankruptcy caretaker away too.

The flames and black smoke jumped back at him as Schiff shoved the box with his feet. He couldn't see through the smoke, so he had to dance around the burning box and then back behind it once he'd set his course. He unlocked the front door and, holding it open, kicked the box as far into the street as he could. A woman walking past with her child screamed and pulled the child out of the way. A man in a peacoat walked over to inspect the flames.

"Hey!" Schiff shouted. "Hey! *Call* someone!"

He was dizzy with smoke or excitement, and his legs tingled. He went back to the other burning magazines and kicked them away from the wall, then danced on them—nipples and pubic mounds, rounded offering mouths—until Schiff's heavy feet had put the fires out. And then, gagging, moving his legs with difficulty, Schiff ran into the back room and put the clipboard under his arm, grabbed his parka, and went coughing into the street.

Schiff heard sirens, his skin simmered with excitement. He went to his knees, an altar boy. He felt a hard push or punch at his back, and he went all the way down. While he still was trying to ask who had attacked him, and why, there were hands on him, pulling at his legs, his belt, hands holding him and tearing his trousers away. The man in the peacoat held Schiff's trousers up for Schiff to see—they were charred below the knees and on one thigh an oval hole burned steadily at the edges, growing wider as Schiff watched.

He let his head drop back. Someone's hand cushioned it. He moaned. He let the clipboard fall away. Schiff discovered that he wept. He laughed and then he started weeping again, daintily touching his injured thighs. Above him, the man who had torn off his trousers, flinched from Schiff's eyes.

Schiff said, "I have to make a call."

The man said, "*What?*"

"It *hurts!* I have to make a call."

"Wait a second, will you? Will you wait? First get fixed up. *Then* you make your call, for chrissakes. Don't be a nuisance right away. Lie down and wait, for chrissakes."

Schiff said, "No—"

The man turned away.

Schiff heard himself snorting, half-naked on the sidewalk. He touched at his burns. The klaxons were close. Now he had to call his wife back, now, he had to. He had to tell her how he knew what to do—save things, place long calls—in emergencies at least. □

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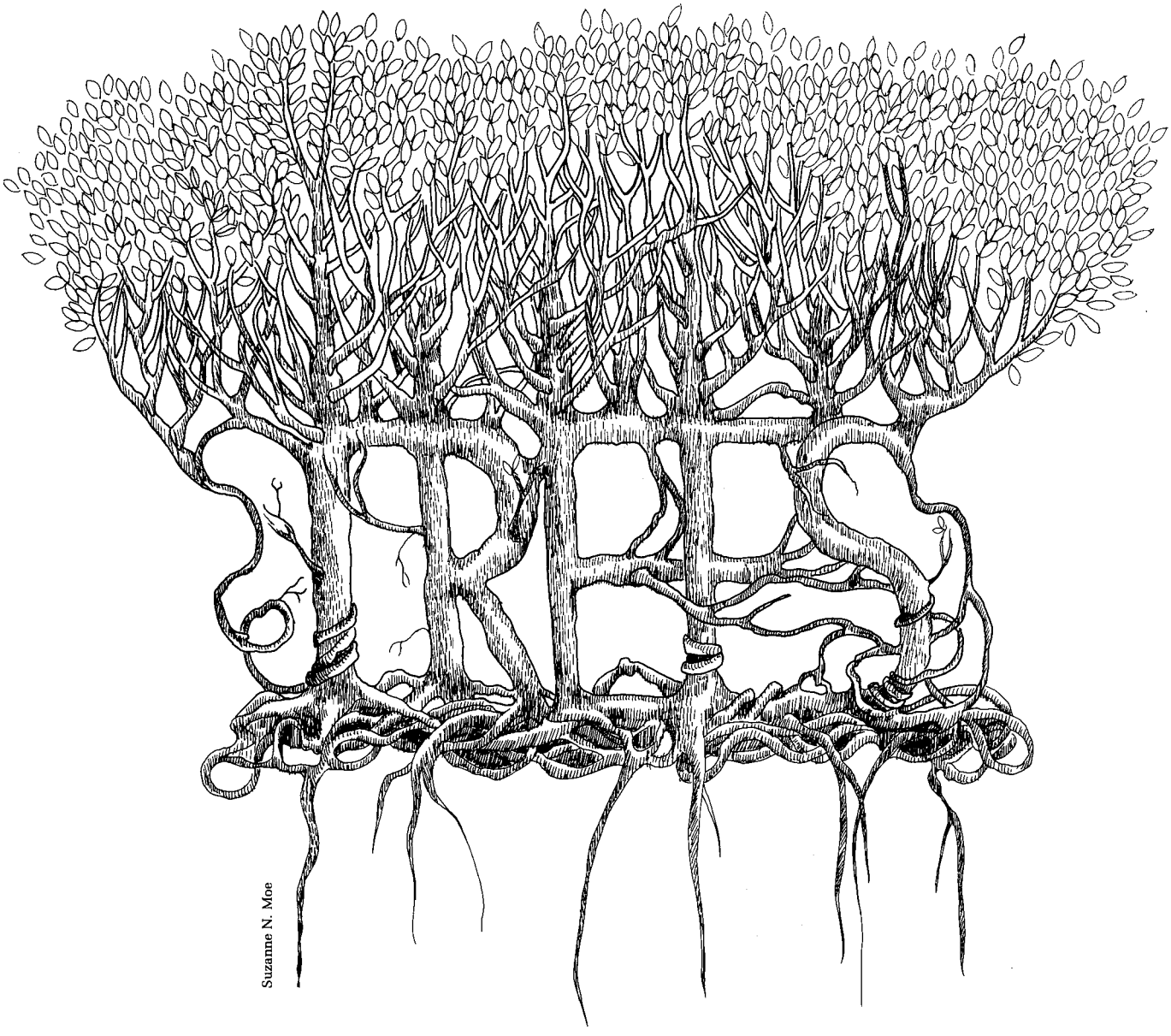
CORA'S TREE



Suzanne N. Moe

MARY PETERSON

". . . if there's puzzlement, it's only as to why anyone would care to take the immense time and effort to describe yet another middle class living room in 'telling detail.'

"I mean, there must be a point where you become clear enough about your feelings to be as sincere as a tractor, say, or a tree."

—A modern male writer.

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The story of Cora's tree is a story of exceptions. It employs five elements that have come to be thought traditional in the art of story-telling. These are plot, character, setting, conflict, and resolution. The plot is very simple and easily stated in a single sentence.

Cora installed a tree in her living room; Donald didn't like it.

The setting is implicit in the plot sentence. It should be pointed out that Cora's is a very solidly middle class living room. For referents to such, one need only tour the showrooms of middle American department stores and shopping malls, or read the accumulated fiction of years (say, the last thirty anyway). Cora is Cora, however, and her living room is just slightly and passably different from other middle class living rooms, if only because she has chosen certain variations on standard arrangements.

Paying attention to technique, let us pretend we are a camera and pan the room. We will do it very quickly, so no one should be puzzled or bored. It is important to establish the limitations of setting very early on. Setting is a stage for fiction.

Walls, light in color. Also: a light colored couch, faded shag rug, pale furniture. The colors do not correspond; they are varying versions of "light." The camera, being bound by spatial limitations not unlike the linear limitations of language, cannot yet shift to show the collection of plastic daisies and tea roses on the near coffee table. The camera cannot look over its shoulder without losing the present image. Consider the wing-backed chair with an ordinary beige fabric cover; consider the huge sideboard with a built-in bar. . . . Consider this, more interesting: a row of photographs on the near wall showing Donald and Cora in all the stages of marriage, arranged chronologically. The honeymoon trip to Bermuda, suntanned and smiling. The Mason's dinner (Donald in his outfit, a cigar in his teeth). One, two, three anniversaries, where Cora's hair is still long and her waistline still shapely, and Donald has not yet acquired his spare tire. Somebody's mother. A drooling nephew (or niece?). Let us characterize the photographs as ordinary, predictable, hopeful, and move on.

An oil reproduction of a ship about to sink in a frothy eggwhite sea. Fake beams on the ceiling, and the surprise of a skylight—about three feet square and in the very center of the room—installed by the last owner, like an eye.

Like a stage.

Also, in the above statement of plot, we have two characters: Cora, and Donald. Donald violently opposed the purchase of the tree, although she assured him it was small and it would not grow too large. She had, she said, every intention of keeping it clipped and groomed. Yet there it sat in the center of the room under the skylight—green, verdant, suggesting fruit.

Donald was not calmed. Donald is rarely quieted by anything. He is a very controlling sort of man who must have the world arranged exactly as he thinks it should be—in short, he is the type who imposes forms on things without much concern for content, and if things don't fit the forms he forces them into fitting. He does not know that he distorts everything. Or that he mutilates. He does not know that he has mutilated their love for each other this way, by reading certain popular books on sexuality and married love, and cohabitation and open marriage. He does not know that he ignores Cora's own very personal and private feelings about loving. He does not know that this kind of violence is well documented in the courts and called by the name of "mental cruelty." He does not know this because the scars caused by emotional trauma are not visible as physical scars, and he trusts nothing that he cannot see or document. Donald is a child of the television age, and he expects instant communication, instant understanding. This is a very sad story. He has all his life taken technology to heart and he believes it is possible to understand and control everything. Mystery has no place in Donald's hard mental life, in his delineations of relationships and choices. Life, he thinks, can be reduced to a series of logical problems, all resolvable, all coming to a neat conclusion. When you don't like the ends, you snip them off. When inner questions give you migraines, you take a pill. When you don't like the wife, you get another. It is rather like buying a new model of a car. His wife, Cora, is in need of emotional plastic surgery but he does not know this. It is not his fault. Donald is a child of the times. He sees no relationship between any of this and the purchase of the grapefruit tree.

The theme of the story is Cora's struggle to define something that cannot be netted with words. Why does one decide one must have a grapefruit tree smack in the middle of one's very middle class, very conventional, living room? Because one has always wished for a trip to Florida but one's husband has been a tightwad? That isn't the reason, either. That is too easy. If Cora were to write about the peculiar seductions of the grapefruit tree she would, unfortunately, become terribly descriptive:

MARY PETERSON is represented in this year's O. Henry Prize Stories. She lives in Maine and teaches at the University of New Hampshire.

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"It has smooth dark leaves that are lighter on the underside, and a way of branching that reminds me of the box elder I used to climb when I was a child. I don't want you to think I don't know the difference between a grapefruit tree—which is a tropical beast—and a northern box elder, in Minnesota. Obviously even to anybody with the slightest intelligence they are quite different. But it is the shape of the branches, the grapefruit tree delicate certainly, and infantile compared with the mature box elder . . . but yet it is the shape of the branches. If I could be there again, which would be travelling back twenty-five years in time and back to when certain relatives, like my mother and father, were alive still, to when my grandfather was still young and robust and my grandmother still staunch and church-going, you would walk with me along the path that led through his property behind the house and adjacent to the bean-field. We would walk on a path that was beaten down from walking, by myself, by my Golden Retriever, by my father when he went to see my grandfather, all of us. The path was short and winding but it seemed long to me then and the grasses went all the way to my knees. They were beautiful grasses, both flat and dark green and waving and thin and brown and dead, and the ground cover from beaten down grass was also tan-brown and I had to wear tennis shoes, since my feet would have been cut otherwise. Why, you might ask me, this particular tree? In the summers it housed red and black flying beetles, very long slim ones with black sensitive antennae, and they were frightening to have on your skin, and they seemed to spit juices that were brown and ugly when you held them pinched between two fingers—like grasshoppers will do. It takes very long to tell the story of the tree. Only, I can remember it so well: it was forked into two large trunks and impossible to climb, it was the one tree I could never climb. Some time, while it was still young, the hired man had left a long iron chain with a single iron ring at the end lying in that fork. For some reason I never understood, nobody removed that chain from the fork in the box elder tree. I mean, for *years* nobody removed it. This was, and is, hard for me to believe. I have a tendency to want to tidy things up, even the world, which might be why I married Donald after all. In any case, when I was eight years old that chain, with that large rusty iron ring, had stayed so long in the fork that it was grown over by tree and embedded in the center of the box elder. The only way to remove it would have been to cut. Cutting the tree that deeply would have been fatal to it. Not to romanticize too much, but you could fairly say that to cut away the chain would have been to kill the box elder since the chain was locked in the tree's heart. I was small and light and therefore I could pull on the chain with impunity. I could hold the ring in my small hands and brace my feet up against the tree and simply hang there, balanced from the ground, a small monkey. They thought it was very funny that I would enjoy such a dull game and wish to do it over and over. They did not know, I think, that stingweed grew up around the base of the tree directly under the chain and that part of the pleasure was in swinging suspended, at a right angle to the tree, directly over the stingweed that would burn my legs if I should slip or lose my balance. I think I tested myself every single day of summer against that tree."

It is very likely that Donald has never in his life had a relationship with a tree. He was raised to be a technician. Therefore, he is a sad man. He only trusts what he can measure with instruments or tools. Trees were to Donald, when he was young, 1) something to seek shade beneath, for picnics; 2) something to climb so you can play War from great heights; and when older, 3) something to avoid when driving around curves; 4) what you plant in the front lawn, an act called "landscaping"; 5) large growths to be cut down into sections and stacked for winter burning, each stack called a "cord"; 6) the long logs he saw when living in Oregon, either being floated down the Columbia River or carried on the backs of impressively noisy flatbed trucks. Also, he has heard that in California there are holes cut into massive redwoods, and one can drive a car through them. He has never read

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

If he read it he would not understand it.

This, of course, returns to the essential conflict of the story, which might be seen as a conflict in spirit as well as in history. Actually, the conflict is psychological—but this is a word to be avoided. We might call Cora a dreamer who cannot let go of her past; we might call Donald a realist. The irony, of course, is that Donald is not a realist at all since he is unable to muster the clarity necessary to address his feelings about history, mystery, or trees. He prefers to play very complicated emotional tricks and evasions, instead. Poor Donald.

Cora is fighting to understand her emotions. She has been fighting to understand them for a long time. In the middle '60's, when they were first married, Cora was convinced by a friend to join a consciousness-raising group. They talked energetically about feminist concerns, and about what was wrong with marriage. It took a great deal of courage. She is solidly middle class and most of the members of her C-R group were young University women, or professionals who worked downtown. It was rumored that such groups tended to break up marriages, since women in them had much support for challenging their husbands but not so much at all for "working on a relationship." In her own group, Cora listened quietly and politely to the others talking about their preference for cunnilingus over intercourse, and their frequency of orgasms. Certain facts about men were impressed upon Cora at that time.

Men are insensitive to women physically.

Men think they are superior to women.

Men think everything they have to say is important.

The only reason Cora still remembers these matters is that she has not, in fully ten years, been able to discover a single emphatic argument or case against them. This personal failure has caused her much despair. But she is resigned to things as they are.

We are ranging far from the tree.

The truth is that Cora is a compromiser, the worst kind of moral sinner. A child of four, she said strawberry ice cream was okay, when she wanted chocolate fudge. An adult, she knows she does not prefer to watch Adam-12 on

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television, and that most people bore her. Yet with Donald she watches Adam-12, and she spends social time with his dull friends. She knows she wants haddock for dinner (broiled, with bay leaf and lemon) when she serves grilled, bloody steak; she knows she wishes to speak to nobody at all in the mornings when she smilingly presents Donald with an eggs and sausage breakfast. When she is alone she knows how often she feels small, and afraid. She hides it. She always hides her private feelings, because (she tells herself) they are foolish, or inappropriate, or maladjusted, or a little mad. She accommodates. She gives. At her wedding she wore a dress of the same color as her bridesmaid.

This is a story against something. Witness Cora deciding she wanted a tree. Consider the case against following through on such a decision:

—One tree cannot bring sudden life to a development house, cannot change the thin pale walls, the ill-fitted panes of glass.

—One tree cannot—no matter how fresh or outrageous or bright—erase the small marital mistakes of years, the annoyances, the grievances, the misgivings, the insomnia, the mornings before the mirror after Donald has left at 8:30 as usual. One tree cannot declare the spirit of a person. One choice cannot.

—Nor can one poor tree reinstate tradition into a life without it, an era without it. Not even if it suggests other, better times, when people were more tuned to the natural world, more respectful. Not now, especially, in the center of a living room, as silly as the fake wood paneling on the Waring blender. Not in Cora's own discount house-furnished living room.

—One tree cannot a forest make.

Yet she found she longed for such things, for such changes.

Could it possibly be, wondered Cora, that each moment of each day of our lives is a choice, that the decision to have a tree is the first positive one I have made in years?

Or that by making said decision I have put myself on the track again? When did I get off it? What track do I mean? (Cora did not know the word, "authenticity." Perhaps the word is overused anyway, done in. It was a strong, even a stately, word once; it was captured by pop psychologists, pow-wowed over, extolled, defined, squeezed—the fluids bleeding from its skin. . . .)

She only wanted a tree.

Later, we must confess, there might come a whole list of things she wanted.

Natural, and not false, light.
Normal, and not wasteful, heat.
Food without additives.
Products that did what they were promised to do.
Repairmen who repaired.
Community.
Trust in government officials.
A graceful old age.
An easy death.

Let us say that Cora, in her sweet and naïve heart, is fairly nearly a Good Girl Scout. She had attended church, as a girl. She was confirmed. She carried her candle and believed. She wanted things to be as they had been promised. They were not. She was abashed; how can one person remake the world? She became a compromiser.

Compromise is a version of evasion.

Cora knows nothing of modern fiction, though —in current parlance—she would "vibrate" to its evasions. She is not a real character, and so she fits in. Her tree is an imposed totem: it fits. Donald is an ordinary flat collection of husbandly clichés. The house could be in any suburb, anywhere. Yet, on the page, Cora and her tree pose a problem. Perhaps her incessant desire for the tree is the problem. Perhaps, on the other hand, the problem is a formal one, and may be diagrammed:

Cora & Donald ⟶ Tree conflict ⟶ Resolution or relaxation of conflict

So the story swivels on its leafy axis, meaning to address the reader. This, also, is a lie. The story has from the first been addressing the reader. It kids itself. It compromises. Witness, the story says, this local and particular event. The presence of the tree—it must be said—is accusatory. Donald returns, finds it, and is angry. He mixes himself a drink. The walls throw pale light. Consider that modern fiction dictates that tradition is dull, overdone; that narrative is outdated; that people are not important. Consider these things not thinking of the humble situation in the suburbs, but of Proust, Woolf, Chekhov, and Tolstoy. Nod wisely at Conrad and Henry James along the way. Think backwards, before television, as though toward infinity, toward the caves and the circle around the fire before them: the stories of prey and rivalry and blood and heroism battle to battle over time.

Come back to this single living room. Consider that Cora's tree is both absurd and unimportant.

"I bought it," Cora says. "I just did."

Donald goes to the sideboard to put ice in his drink. "Okay," he says. "Did you have to put it in the middle?"

"It felt right, there."

"Who said anything about feelings?" he snorts.

"It reminded me . . ." she begins.

"Who said anything about memory?" In the ledger of his mind, Donald is balancing composure against the worth of anger; he is not bothering to try to understand her, but only to calculate the risks in blood pressure to his own person.

"Move it," he says.

"No," Cora says. "It stays. It stays in my sleep and it stays when I try to think too long. It stays in the mirror and in the hypoallergenic makeup I buy at Field's. It stays when I call the vacuum cleaner repairman for the third time and it stays when I put the T.V. dinners in the oven. It stays in the sepia photographs of my parents and the hairdresser's wink when I leave him on Saturday mornings. It will always be there. Even if I go to an old folks home and even if I die of cancer. Even if I am given to science and they cut me in pieces and dispense an eye here, a kidney there. It damn well stays because there is nothing else to be done with it, nothing at all, and it sits in the center, and that is how it is."

Donald, technician, looks at her, and at the tree. He says nothing. Or nothing *she* will hear. □

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catherine gammon

THE BODY

It was in a southern country. A country without such crimes. A sexual country, yes. A criminal country. "But crimes of sex," her father said, "they leave that to us."

She'd gone off with her camera, her taperecorder, names. She had a contract with a magazine. She wanted to make a name for herself, a career. She had contacts, a sharp tongue. The father followed. He sought the help of his embassy. "Leave it alone," they told him. "She was the victim of a sex crime." He brought in a doctor. The doctor said she had not been molested. "It's a sex crime nonetheless." They mentioned the marks of strangulation, the bruises at her breasts, thighs, swollen purple, hard rotting lumps. The ambassador argued for cremation. The father refused. He had to know more. She would be embalmed, taken home. He sat in the room with her corpse, waiting for the morticians. He held her cold head between his hands. He stared into her whitened, icy face, tried to read in its expression her final thought. Someone had closed the eyes, though one insisted on slipping slightly open, creating the illusion that the lids were fluttering, that within the cold body his daughter lay alive.

"Nina," he whispered. "Nina," half-expecting answer. He would have raised the sheet to look at her nakedness beneath. The attendant stood guard at the door. He would have prayed aloud to a dubious God, felt the same restraint. All he knew were the eyes of the foreign guard behind him, Nina's lower lip caught beneath the upper row of teeth, the look of astonishment, surprise that was her face, the unforgiveable coldness of her head between his palms.

He flew home, taking the body with him. He ordered an autopsy. Death by strangulation. A detailed list of her cuts and bruises, of the state of her inner organs, some ruptured. No evidence of sexual violation, before or after death. They said she was mugged then found in that alley. Her leg had been broken after death, after discovery, in order to straighten it for the undertaker's table, for the coffin.

He received a call from the country. A man had been arrested, had confessed. The father refused to believe. He went to her magazine.

"What do you hope to prove?" her editor asked him.

He didn't know. To find out, he said. To find out.

The editor sighed, offered him a cigarette. "It won't be any use," he said. "We warned her too."

The father argued. They ran a story, very small.

K. Dyble Thompson

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The trial date was set. The father flew to the country. The case attracted international attention. The magazine contacted him, asking for an article.

He found the accused man's lawyer. "He didn't confess," the lawyer admitted. "Of course he didn't confess. They traded with him. They gave him money. For his wife, for his children."

And who are you then, the father wanted to know. Why does such a man need a lawyer?

The lawyer gave no answer. He was young, handsome. "I can tell you much," he said in English. "Off the record."

"Did you see the body?" the father asked. "Didn't you see her body?"

"Photos," the lawyer replied. "Many color photos. Taken in the alley where she was found."

"Placed."

"In the light of dawn. The color is excellent."

She had been in the country three days. Her father remembered the voice of that editor, "She was looking for death. Not necessarily her own." He asked to see the prisoner she had come here to interview. "It is being arranged," they told him. They had known her intentions from the moment she got on the plane that brought her to them. They had taken her in for questioning. She had not seen the prisoner. There was no point to the father's investigation. His embassy would handle everything.

He went again to the lawyer. "Who did she see?" he asked. She was here three days before her disappearance. "Who did she see?" The lawyer shrugged. "Who?"

"I saw her," he said.

"You?"

"I was on her list." He said this very quietly. "Between us," he added quickly.

"Ahhh . . ." the father said. "And who else?"

"I can't tell you."

"Won't."

The lawyer shrugged. "It's not for me to bring them in. They know nothing. She is dead. Leave it alone."

"Can you get me those photos?" He would use them for his article.

"Perhaps," the lawyer said.

The trial began, longwinded, slow. The father listened intently for a clue. The embassy watched him, discreetly, from a distance. In the evenings he sat in a cafe down the street from his hotel and each night drank a bit more brandy. Sleeping, he dreamed of her, alive, laughing, beautiful, a child, a woman, speaking, "Of course I'm alive. I am alive." How could she be otherwise?

In the mornings, over coffee, he studied the postcard she had sent to him, the postcard he'd found waiting when he returned home with the body.

Dear Daddy—in her small fine hand—*the sun is wonderful here, the light so white. It is terrible to know what this country is, how we have kept it so. The sun is so wonderful, you do not want to think these things, do not want to know them. It is hard to force myself on with my business. I would rather lie in the sun and read a medieval history or a newly published reminiscence of the civil war. As if these things were only in the past. Every day I am reminded they are not. I must go on. Love, Nina.*

He studied the card, every morning of the trial, drinking coffee. He was sure it held a clue. These were her last words, almost from the grave. They had arrived after her death. He knew there was somewhere, hidden, an inkling. "She was in search of it," her editor had said.

He called New York. "Why did you say that?" he asked. "What did that mean?"

The editor replied, vaguely, philosophically. He asked about the progress of the article. The father mentioned the photographs. "Good," said the editor. "Anything else?" The father pressed his question. The editor coughed.

The father read him the postcard. "Are these," he asked, "the words of a girl in search of death?"

"It's a country destroyed, by war, by peace, again and again. She went to learn, to suffer. She was ashamed."

"How do you know? Why do you say this?"

"You forget that I knew her too."

"It was not a sex crime," the father said again.

"Maybe not. Does it matter?"

"You did not see her body," the father insisted. "You did not hold her head between your hands." He hung up. He studied the postcard. He dreamed. She spoke to him from behind black lace. "Medieval civil war," she said. "Newly written histories, alley crimes, sexual reminscence, wives and starving children." He woke remembering this string of words and thought, No, she did not say all that. Medieval civil war, that was all she'd said. The rest was a trick of memory.

He went to the University. He spoke with medieval scholars, one by one. He did not identify himself as her father. He watched their eyes for recognition. There was a woman. "My father," she said, "died in the civil war. It is a great temptation to talk to your people about the state of our country. I know nothing political. You sometimes know more than we, except when you are romantics." He said: "I think my daughter sent me to you."

The woman nodded. She was thin, dark featured, past forty, beautiful.

"It's unusual here," he asked, "a woman, in your position?"

"Yes," the woman replied.

"She did send me to you?"

"Yes," the woman said. "I saw her." She sat silent at her desk. "There was a document," she said at last.

"What?"

"I don't know. The girl didn't know. It was in her possession. It was passed to her when she arrived."

"Why did she come to you?"

"The prisoner she wanted to interview was my lover. Many years ago."

"I see."

"She was a romantic, your daughter. She knew nothing of our country. She came for her own reasons."

"It was not a sex crime," the father said.

"All crimes are crimes of sex."

"You believe that? Here?"

The woman laughed. "No," she said bitterly. "But your daughter did."

The father took the postcard from his coat pocket. He passed it to the woman. "If this phrase brought me to

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you," he said, "who else am I to see?" The woman read his daughter's words, puzzling out the fine foreign hand. She mentioned a name. "I'll phone him for you if you like?"

"Yes," the father said. "Good."

He left the University musing on his daughter's sense of intrigue, the dropping of clues as though she had known this card would end up crumpled in his pocket, his guide map to the city.

He went to the lawyer. He wanted a meeting with the accused.

"Perhaps you should look at the photographs," the lawyer said. He opened a drawer. "They could be sold for pornography."

"You speak of my daughter's corpse," the father said stiffly, extending his hand.

She lay naked in the alley, her coldness and the dawn light giving a purple cast to her skin. She lay sprawled on her back, her clothes bundled beneath her hips to raise her pelvis, pudendum thrust forward, one knee—the one they later had to break—bent high, legs spread open, arms extended. The photos circled round her, her body a piece of sculpture, from every view something new to see. Her breasts hung upside down, toward her neck, looking fuller than they ever had in life. At the stiff pointed nipples there were marks of teeth, dark circles, deep bruises, broken skin. Her head hung back and one eye, the left, crept open. Her lower lip was caught between her teeth, her face still showed its expression of surprise.

"These pictures are a crime," he said. He studied them carefully. They were erotic pictures. "As if the murderer had arranged her so . . . only to look."

"Precisely," the lawyer said. "That's his confession."

The father stared.

"There is no point in your seeing him."

"Are these for me?"

The lawyer nodded.

At the trial, the father watched the accused man. He could not believe him guilty. He watched the faces of the men in uniform, as if, when the actual killer, killers appeared, he would sense them, the light would change, burn red, a smell would be in the air and he would know. But the killers stayed away. At night he sat at the cafe watching the street, listening to the city's bells tolling the hours, waiting for visible signs.

He telephoned the medievalist. She sent him to the man whose book of tales from the civil war had recently been published under the new liberalization. The writer served him brandy and cigars and they sat together on his balcony looking down into the night. "She had no identity, your daughter," the writer said. "She was a blank page in search of words. She was looking for a cause, something more visible, more immediate than she could find in her native country."

"There is no one here who believes the official lie of her death."

"Tomorrow, my friend, her political prisoner, once my comrade, will be publicly interviewed by the international press. Journalists from thirty-four countries will address him with her questions."

"You mean she has accomplished what she came for?"

"It is twenty years since anyone has seen this man. When he was taken prisoner he had been in hiding nearly as long. He was hunted with perseverance. He was betrayed. His betrayers have been hunted in their turn."

"My daughter, sir, my daughter . . ."

"She was a foreigner here. You are all foreigners here."

The father sighed, stared out into the night. "This document . . ." he began.

The writer waved his hand. "Her document was a prop, an illusion."

"What was it? Where is it?"

"Military. Foreign troops, clandestine operations. Nothing of consequence to us."

"Who gave it to her?"

"One of your own."

"And where is it now?"

"When I saw her, she offered it to me."

"But you didn't take it?"

"No."

"And it was not for this that she was killed?"

"Who can say?" The writer swirled his brandy in his glass, looked up to the stars. "She was like a child, your daughter. She wanted to play a game. She wanted the game to be real. She tried very hard. They believed her, they interrogated her. Eventually they must have seen their error, but it had gone too far. You cannot do these things to foreigners, not when they are only journalists, private citizens. And so they killed her."

"Everyone seems to know this . . ."

"To us it is familiar."

"But then—"

"You are foreigners here. So now they parade my friend before the international press. Otherwise he would be forgotten, like everything else."

The father brought out the photographs. The writer glanced at them and sighed. "Leave it alone, sir. Get rid of those pictures, go back to your country."

At the cafe he drank another brandy and read her postcard, over and over. He touched the glossy surface of the pictures in his pocket. He remembered the set of photographs he'd taken the winter before. He had been pleased when she asked him to do them. Always before, she'd run from his camera. Settling her things, he came across them. The series was incomplete, the four best missing. He telephoned her editor.

"She had many friends," he said. He asked about the progress of the article.

The father became evasive. "The light here . . ." he said. The editor waited. "They tell me she had no identity. They say she was a romantic. She came in search of reality."

"She was only there three days. They are foreigners. They couldn't have known her as we do. Perhaps you should come home."

"The quality of the light . . ."

In the morning he walked to the alley where she was found. He brought out the photographs and walked around the space, matching each picture to a particular point of view. In the empty alley he attempted to recon-

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struct her body, her presence and position. He imagined he would see here there, ephemeral, an ectoplasmic form. He pulled himself back. He had never believed in such things. Besides, he told himself, it is not here that she died, the alley was a set, an artifice, *she* had never been here.

He walked on to the prison building where the press conference was to be held. It is there, he thought, somewhere there that she died, somewhere within those massive white walls that she was tortured. He tightened his hand around the postcard in his pocket. He knew again the feel of her cold fingers. Photographers took his picture as he walked up the marble steps of the building. His face would appear around the world, father of the dead girl. Girl, he thought, they all call her girl. What they would give for these photographs, he thought. Sooner or later someone would get hold of them and she would be spilt naked all across the world. Suddenly he recalled her, a child, his wife dead and his small girl Nina crawling to his lap to comfort him, for comfort, her tiny child's arms closing at his neck. What had this purple marble erotica created in a foreign alley to do with her, his little girl? And what had he, after all, a stranger, her father?

He entered the gallery of the room where the press conference would be held. Down in the front there was a table and beside it two men, uniformed, shining with red and gold epaulets. One smoked a dark cigarette in a white holder. The father stared into their faces in search of her death. The floor was crowded, loud with brutal laughter and shouts in many tongues. Smoke and heat filled the close air, the sweat and weight of bodies. When the political prisoner was brought out—shuffling, white-haired, bent—hush circled outward in the room. An introduction was made. Questioning began, simultaneously translated into five languages. The prisoner said he was well cared for. To many questions he replied only: "That was so very long ago." They fed and clothed him, kept him clean. He had nothing more to say than that. He closed the session with a prayer for the dead girl who had come to his country for this moment and had not survived to see it. In the crowd across the gallery the father saw the woman from the University and with her the writer of reminiscences. She appeared to be crying. He thought that he should call on her again. This was not the interview his daughter had died for. The two did not acknowledge him, perhaps did not even see him there, so intent were they in watching the relic of their friend.

When he returned to his hotel, he found a message from the editor. Urgent, it said. He sighed. He felt fatigued. He took a shower. Perhaps they were right, he thought. Perhaps he should go home. He could think of nothing more he could do here. Leave it alone, they had said to him, again and again. Perhaps they were right.

"It's the document," he heard when he telephoned the editor. "Someone's mailed us a microfilmed copy. Anonymously. I've given a dupe to the State Department for verification, but the man they sent for it said it looked authentic."

"The document . . ." the father repeated. "Yes. I see . . ."

"This could be our story."

He tried to think. "You didn't see her broken knee," he said. He fell silent. The editor inquired about the press conference. The father became vague. "Have you ever seen this country?"

"Are you writing me an article or aren't you?" the editor demanded.

"No," the father said. He hung up.

He continued to read the postcard in the morning over coffee, he attended the trial, listened for the ringing of the bells, drank brandy in the afternoons and nights, watching the street for signs of her death.

One early evening a man joined him, introduced himself as a representative from the magazine, offered his condolences—no, he had not known her. He was here to do the story. He said he understood the father's feelings, the editor understood. The father nodded. The man reported on the document, State said it was authentic, but unrelated to her death. Someone had apparently passed it to her, and she in turn had given it for safekeeping to another, their anonymous informant. She had given this informant no instructions, there was nowhere any indication of her intent, its destination.

"Was it for this then that they questioned her?"

The journalist shrugged. "No one knows. State thinks not."

"But they're here, they too are involved."

"There is nothing we can prove," the journalist said. "You must understand that."

The father nodded, vague. They sat in silence.

"About these photographs . . ." the journalist began.

"There are no photographs," the father said.

He rereads his postcard. He wanders to the alley. He listens to the bells. Handling the glossy pictures, he no longer sees his daughter in them. Only their unearthly purple beauty. For this? he asks. For these?

He sits in his cafe and drinks a brandy, and another. He is aware of the embassy man across the street, always watching. It occurs to him that there is no need for him to puzzle out the postcard, that these embassy people know her exact movements, everyone she'd seen. They will not tell. He wonders at what point they will intervene, begin to stop him, anticipate his visits, his inquiry—cut it short. He drinks another brandy, salutes his compatriot. The man nods, short, abrupt. Dismal, the father thinks. Earning his daily bread. Nothing more. Such a man, perhaps, was the killer of his daughter. They had watched her from all sides.

He shoves his glass across the table. Where was this embassy man when his daughter was murdered? He stands. He wavers. They deny knowledge of her. There had been only her one official meeting with a minor bureaucrat, identifying herself, asking for assistance in getting into the prison. He sits. Who was it that she saw there? Perhaps that was significant. Perhaps it was there she obtained this document. The name of the clerk has never been mentioned, perhaps will be withheld. He will inquire. Tomorrow, he says, tomorrow. He orders another brandy. The sun of the afternoon is gold, orange, lavender. White, she'd written, the light so white. It is not white. He has seen it in all its colors. Not once has it been white. □

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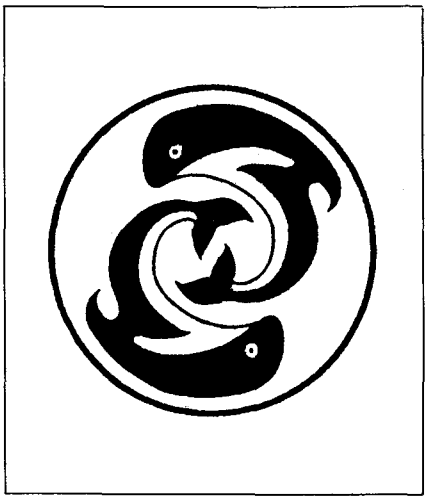
SUMMINGS UP

The Future According to H.G. Wells

In 1920 H.G. Wells did mankind the courtesy of telling it the story of its life. The story of *The Outline of History* was familiar in most details, but the general shape was new, for human events were not bound together by the decisions of great men or the accidents of national conflict, but by the increasing self-consciousness of human communities through the development of communications. Wells' purposes in fashioning his narrative of man's history was not to offer a panorama of memory, but to free man from his past and to guide him toward the future. By telling men what they were, he hoped to persuade them to make themselves what they might be.

Long before he wrote *The Outline of History*, Wells had developed the habit of viewing history as mutable and open to rearrangement. Two of his early science fiction successes exploited the most alterable part of history, the future, and he considered himself to be the inventor of futurology with his remarkable *Anticipations* (1901), a book studded with keen predictions about the future. Because he did not view history as a fixed line, he felt no embarrassment in describing it as a continuum including what had been, but also what was yet to be. The present was not, for him, the end of a process or story, but a juncture, hence Wells treated all historical accounts as provisional, though in general he inherited the Victorian assumption, stated to his taste in Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872) and Thomas Huxley's many essays and lectures, that human history was progressing in an evolutionary, ascending, or improving manner. Nonetheless, like Huxley, he never supposed that this improvement was guaranteed. His many books hint always that the future of man is in man's hands. Consequently, it was important that man should have an accurate picture of



where he had been and where he might go. To understand the history of his race, man could begin with the rudimentary proving ground of his own nature. Imitating the biologists' maxim that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, Wells assumed that the life of the individual followed a process of growth and maturity similar to that of the race. If a man could examine his own life and, by will and discipline, shape its course, then mankind could do something similar. The main purpose of Wells' career was to tell men this simple truth and to persuade them to act on it.

Wells felt that his personal history reflected the history of his time. He insisted that his autobiography was an account, open to modification, of a "very ordinary brain," and he pictured his life as representative. Thus his mother "becomes a symbol of the blind and groping parental solicitude of that age, a solicitude which enslaved and hampered where it sought to aid and establish; and my individual story merges into the story of the handicapped intelligence of our species, blundering heavily towards the realization and handling of vast changes and still vaster dangers and opportunities."

Wells' fictional characters inherit this tendency to see their careers as typical, thereby demonstrating at least two things: that Wells' fiction is powerfully autobiographical, and that these characters are educational devices whose purpose is to liberate Wells and his readers by offering proof that each individual can shape his life into a personal history which helps to shape the larger story of the race. George Ponderevo, in *Tono-Bungay* (1909), says that he is trying to render "nothing more nor less than Life—as one man has found it. I want to tell—myself . . ." His life is worth recording, he says, because he has had the advantage of transcending the normal patterns; he has not lived "true to the rules of [a] type" but has been jerked out of his stratum and has lived crosswise to various planes of existence. His life is peculiarly indicative of his times. Moreover, his slow acquisition of consciousness about the nature of society parallels, in microcosm, the human race's developing consciousness. Although he claims to be offering not a "constructed tale," but "unmanageable reality," George records a life shaped from disorder and confusion into order and purpose. He calls his guiding purpose Science or Truth. At one time George had felt that men were "creatures of change and impulse and unmeaning traditions." He himself was "without an object to hold [his] will together," until he came to idealize Science. Then, he says, "I discovered myself for the first time" as a being with a direction and a purpose. Once the pattern of his own life has taken form in his imagination, Science teaches George to subordinate his individual life to the larger life of man which "emerges from life with each year one lives and feels, and generation by generation and age by age, [though] the how and why of it are all beyond the compass of [his] mind . . ."

That George's incomplete life story is meant to recapitulate a larger

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history is most evident at the end of the novel when he makes his night journey down the Thames. "To run down the Thames so," he says, "is to run one's hand over the pages in the book of England from end to end." The pages of George's book offer a similar experience, and now at their close George feels that he can see himself and his country without illusion. He moves beyond the monuments of human success and failure toward the sea, the illimitable mystery of the future. "We are all things that make and pass," he says, "striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea." As he says this he is at the boundary between land and sea, past and future, the provisional point where he can give life a shape because he believes it is open to change.

Tono-Bungay was an early attempt to present a private history as a model for mankind's story. In creating this model, Wells was also inventing his personal history. Through fiction, he offered himself an alternative design for his life. He was to repeat this test time and again in his fiction and in his *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) as well. The practice is apparent in *The New Machiavelli* (1911). George Ponderevo, claiming amateur standing, demonstrated the individual's ability to order his life by recording his "story"; Richard Remington, the central character of *The New Machiavelli*, goes a step further in treasuring as well the ordering power of language.

Like the original Machiavelli, Remington wishes to be an architect of history, though he is concerned principally with what history will be, not with what it has been. In telling his story, which resembles Wells', Remington gives his life a shape which is governed, like Ponderevo's, by an abstract ideal. The pattern of his life is similar as well, showing a progress from impulsive disorder to intellectual command. However, Remington's lawless nature conflicts with the conservative regulations of society and he is unable to put his plans for a New Republic into effect. Nonetheless, he discovers that just as he may give his own past life a design by documenting it, he may also compose the future by fixing its outline in print. He believes that he has found his place in the larger destiny of mankind.

> I was as it were one of a little swarm of would-be reef builders looking back at the teeming slime upon the ocean floor. All the history of mankind, all the history of life, has been and will be the story of something struggling out of the indiscriminated abyss, struggling to exist and prevail over and comprehend individual lives—an effort of insidious attraction, an idea of invincible appeal.

Remington's book represents the embodied will of man, the forcing into reality of what was only dream.

Remington, like other Wells characters, discovers that any writer is an historian, for he is a recorder of what passes in man. The writer gives an idea substance through an act of will. His power is the paradigm of what Wells desires for mankind. The truest act of human will is to change circumstantial nature and this can best be done by altering man's picture of nature first. History is an attempt to recreate that picture. History, Wells said more than once, was the story of man struggling toward comprehension and control. Remington's book, while serving as the history of an individual life, provides at the same time a model for the life of the race. Out of ignorance and power, mankind comes to self-consciousness and purpose by shaping the story of his past and giving a direction to his future.

Like Remington, Wells was devoting himself to a literature designed to create a new picture of human history. He realized that his schemes reflected his own desires and were not necessarily "true." The titles of his books of social commentary indicate that he was more interested in the shape of the future than the record of the past: *Anticipations* (1901), *The Discovery of the Future* (1902), *Mankind in the Making* (1903), *The Future in America* (1906), *New Worlds for Old* (1908), *What is Coming?* (1916), *The Salvaging of Civilization* (1921), and so on. History is the past chaos out of which a design may come into being. But it is man who evokes that design. And it is the writer who is master of that evocation.

Many of Wells' novels from about the time of *Tono-Bungay* to *The Outline of History* concentrate upon the theme of an individual life emerging out of ignorance and chaos to some form of command and focus. Some are mainly concerned with the relationships between individuals, such as *Marriage* (1912), *The Passionate Friends* (1913), *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* (1914), *The Soul of a Bishop* (1917), while others more clearly merge individual and racial interests in the same pattern, as in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916) and *Joan and Peter* (1918). Other novels of this period, for example, *The War in the Air* (1908) and *The World Set Free* (1914), actually carry human history from present chaos into an altered or improved future. All of these works reveal a consistent pattern. However, Wells offered the pattern more vigorously as time passed, for the First World War convinced him that mankind's need to consolidate its racial will toward a coherent social system or World State was more urgent than he had supposed. He became more evangelistic in the writings that followed the war, constantly reminding men to observe the lessons provided by the past and to seize the time to make a better future.

It was mankind's desperate need to understand its story that impelled Wells to offer his *Outline*. But before he published that work he presented in his modernization of the story of Job, *The Undying Fire* (1919), a manifesto summarizing what he and Job Huss, the martyr-like protagonist of the novel, patterned on F.W. Sanderson, the headmaster of Oundle, wished to achieve. Huss says that when he came to realize that the universe was not benign, but had "a face of boundless evil," he realized that it was necessary for man to control nature if he was to know a better world. "There is nothing beyond man," he says, "unless men will that something shall be." Sir Eliphas disputes Huss' view, arguing that "this life is only the first page of the great book we have to read," and implying that the rest of the volume is already composed and only remains to be read. Huss is less hopeful and less passive, for he feels that the future is a changing mystery. "We have a vision of the opening of the story, but the first pages we cannot read." Man, in fact, must write that story, not expect to sit back and be carried along by a preexisting narrative. And Huss, who believes that a knowledge of history is requisite for the creation of a controlled future, has apparently succeeded in transmitting his vision to others, for one of his former students, writing from the battlefields of France says: *"You made us think and feel that the past of the world was our own history; you made us feel that we were in*

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one living story with the reindeer men and the Egyptian priests, with the soldiers of Caesar and the alchemists of Spain; nothing was dead and nothing alien; you made discovery and civilization our adventure and the whole future our inheritance."

* * *

Wells had been concerned with the future from the very outset of his career and had written a diagram for that future in *A Modern Utopia* as early as 1905. *The World Set Free* (1914) was another fictional picture of how the future of man might be given a suitable form. After publication of *The Outline of History,* Wells became more insistent in his science-fiction and fantasy tales, reiterating in different ways the contrast between past and present chaos with future design, from the outright oppositions in *Men Like Gods* (1923) and *The Dream* (1924), to Ruritanian sketches like *The King Who Was a King* (1929) and *The Brothers* (1938), and the grimmer political projection of *The Holy Terror* (1939), to the variously dark or playful pieces such as *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* (1928), *The Croquet Player* (1936) and *Star-Begotten* (1937).

These outright departures from realistic portrayal were accompanied by a consistent stream of non-fictional essays and books making the same points in more immediate and practical terms. These works show that Wells was trying to transfer the picture of his personal history, which he believed to be typical of his generation, to mankind at large. He believed that just as he had found freedom through the willed control of random passions and the expression of his ideas, mankind could control the beast in himself and transform the world from jungle to garden through improved communications.

Two realistic novels written after the *Outline* illustrate Wells' attitude in a more complicated and intriguing fashion. In *The Secret Places of the Heart* (1922), Wells went out of his way to demonstrate the connection between racial and personal history. Sir Richmond Hardy, seeking a cure for nervous distress, makes a tour of England's most important archeological sites and discovers that "Archeology is very like remembering." He helps a young American woman "remember" the racial past, and they feel that they are sharing the adolescence of the race. They sense that they have given history a more intimate meaning. Thus, when they visit Glastonbury Abbey and, ironically, Wells Cathedral, it is "like turning over the pages of the history of our family to and fro." Sir Richmond had set out on his excursion because he felt that his will was failing. Having travelled into the little-known regions of his own nature by examining the racial past and opening his heart to another human being, he returns to practical life reassured about himself and the purpose of human endeavor which he is in a position to guide. During his therapeutic holiday, Sir Richmond has traced man's history and recovered the vision of a future open to modification by man. Unfortunately, he dies while laboring to give that future shape.

The Secret Places of the Heart is a slight attempt compared to the elaborate examination of these same themes in *The World of William Clissold* (1926). Clissold openly acknowledges that while men have made valiant attempts "to impose a coherent and comprehensive story" upon life, there is actually "no plot nor schema nor drama nor pattern in the flow of events as they are apprehended by human minds . . ." Consequently, the design that man gives to history—the story he tells about mankind—is a fabrication, but a fiction with a purpose, for if man can picture a better world, he may be able to live into it. Although Clissold sees his life divided into chapters and says that "Thinking of one's childhood is like opening a great neglected volume haphazard and reading in it," he knows that there is no story to individual or racial history until man wills that there should be one. In telling his story, Clissold gives it form. Likewise, if one tells the story of mankind, one creates a believable shape that mankind may approximate.

In *The Salvaging of Civilization* (1921), Wells said that what modern civilization needs is "a revised and enlarged Bible . . . to restore a common ground of ideas and interpretations . . ." The original Bible had given man "a Cosmogony. It gave him an account of the world in which he found himself and of his place in it. And then it went on to a general history of mankind. It did not tell him that history as a string of facts and dates, but as a moving and interesting story into which he himself finally came, a story of promises made and destinies to be fulfilled. It gave him a dramatic relationship to the schemes of things. It linked him to all mankind with a conception of relationships and duties. It gave him a place in the world and put a meaning into his life. It explained him to himself and to other people, and it explained other people to him. In other words, out of the individual it made a citizen with a code of duties and expectations." Because science had invalidated the Bible's scheme, Wells argued, modern man needed a new story of this order. He coyly admitted that for lack of such a Bible the reading public had "taken my *Outline* very eagerly."

Wells did not suggest that the Bible was a true account. Indeed, it is clear that its account of the world was no more than a fiction, an hypothesis according to which men could organize their lives and give their society purpose until a new hypothesis was required. Mankind requires a new hypothesis, Wells urged, a new story according to which he can shape his life, even if it is a fiction which will have to be modified anew. Behind this conviction is Wells' belief that the true direction of man's progress is from selfish individualism to communal cooperation. This is the sequence he hoped for in himself and described in the *Outline.* "History now becomes more important than biography," he summed up in *Christina Alberta's Father* (1925). Individual adventures are no longer important, for the race has reached "a maximum of *individuation*" and is turning toward "synthesis and cooperation."

* * *

All of Wells' fiction and journalism after *The Outline of History* was designed to create a new Bible, a new cosmogony for modern man. Mankind, he hoped, would imitate the novelist who could imagine an alternative reality and then bring it into being. He urged men to believe that they were capable of this high endeavor, but they did not seem to comprehend. How this must have baffled Wells. It had all been so simple in his own case. He told the story of his own growth and success time and again in his fiction and even disguised it as the story of the race, but though the race bought the book by

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millions, they did not get the message. Even in his decline Wells continued to read his own story into that of the race, and as he faded he foresaw in *Mind at the End of its Tether* (1945) the *Götterdämmerung* of mankind. It has been said that Wells sacrificed his fictional powers to propaganda, but he had never believed that fiction should be separated from its context and shorn of practical purpose. His triumph was his attempt to identify fiction with the broadest of contexts—the history of the race. His tragedy was that the story offered did not capture the imagination of his audience. It was his own story that he wrote—his own dream and his own fear. In the end, he would have said, that is all that history can ever be.

—John R. Reed

Quiet Desperation: The Career of James Jones

It is an irony in Western literary history that many of its greatest works are more the consequence of man's obsession with war than of his desire for peace. Few can deny that such books as *The Iliad, War and Peace, Verdun,* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* will remain so ennobling as to insure Homer, Tolstoy, Romains, and Remarque places of high honor in the literary pantheon. Possessed of a collective sense of social conscience, each was able to grasp the horrendous impact of war on society better than the historian caught in his methodological trap, or the philosopher in his speculative void.

James Jones, too, was a novelist sensitive to the dehumanizing effect of war and military training. Most of his adult life represented a soul-searing attempt to understand and explain the nature of military service, the agony of combat, the awful loneliness and sense of terror that comes with the realization that death is at hand, and the reliving of those moments of trauma over and over again in memory—to the point of obsession. Indeed, his last work, *Whistle,* is dedicated to ". . . every man who served in the U.S. Armed Forces in World War II whether he survived or not; whether he made a fortune serving, or not; whether he fought or not; whether he did time or not; whether he went crazy, or didn't."

Jones was among those born (1921) and raised in that framework of political madness, social upheaval, intellectual uncertainty, and economic chaos which were a consequence of The Great War. Moreover, like so many who were subjected to the poverty and want of the thirties, Jones was caught up in the maelstrom of the second total war of the twentieth century. He was one of those who received so little and from whom so much would be demanded.

Jones' first and, by far, most widely recognized book is not concerned with combat. Rather, *From Here to Eternity* is about the inner lives of desperation endured by enlisted members of a professional "peacetime army" (which numbered but 190,000 as late as 1939). The book, published in 1951, launched Jones on his writing career despite charges that he was obscene, repetitive, and guilty of sloppy construction. Even John W. Aldridge, later one of Jones' severest critics, praised the book as ". . . a phenomenon of life giving vitality." The only other study of the military to approach Jones' book is Anton Myrer's *Once An Eagle,* which includes a penetrating examination of the "between the wars army" from the officers' viewpoint.

From Here to Eternity tells of the constant threat to personal integrity inherent in the regulated existence that is army life. Robert E. Lee Prewitt, the central figure, is beset by the problem of maintaining *his* values in the face of extreme pressures to conform to the demands of the company commander. Equally important is the realistic manner in which Jones tells of the awful dullness, loneliness, compulsive gambling, excessive carousing, and sometimes savage activity that formed the accepted characteristics of behavior in the intellectual void that comprised army life for all but a very few. The work was, and is, particularly appealing to many World War II veterans who can identify with the scenes and characters as depicted by Jones. Most have experienced like events, and met men resembling Maggio, Prewitt, Stark, Warden, and Judson during their own tours of duty.

The book was transformed into a most remarkable movie*—remarkable not only for the screen writing of Daniel Taradash and directing of Fred Zinneman, but also for the casting accomplished by the producer, Buddy Adler, and his staff.

Burt Lancaster was First Sergeant Warden; Deborah Kerr played the passionate Karen Holmes; Montgomery Clift was the sensitive Prewitt; Frank Sinatra's career was salvaged when he persuaded Adler to cast him as Angelo Maggio—for which he received an Academy Award; Donna Reed was Lorene, the prostitute; Ernest Borgnine played the brutal stockade sergeant, "Fatso" Judson. The movie, like the book, achieved the same durability as *Citizen Kane,* and by 1953 it appeared that the tyro author was on his way to gaining recognition as one of the great American novelists.

2.

Unfortunately, Jones suffered the same fate in the fifties and early sixties as so many of the promising writers of the forties. In the eyes of most critics he failed to live up to that promise. Perhaps the reason for the hostile attitude by critics is that his first work was simply too good, which made it extremely difficult, if not imposible, for it to be surpassed.

Probably only one of Jones' books, *Some Came Running* (1957), deserved the scathing reviews it received, though the severity of some of the reviewers was extreme. J. Donald Adams, for example, charged: "It stands for the kind of literature that might be written by a half-witted hill-billy who after a manly struggle with the alphabet had managed to assemble those characters in some-

**The television version, broadcast on NBC earlier this year, was not restricted to the two-hour time limit imposed by executives at Columbia studios in 1953. It ran more than five hours (in three installments) and featured Natalie Wood as Karen, William Devane as Sgt. Warden, Steve Railsbach as Prewitt, Peter Boyle as Fatso, Joe Pantoliano as Maggio, and Kim Basinger as Lorene.*

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thing resembling an understandable and orderly appearance."

Other critics complained that the book, in which Jones tells of the return of a World War II veteran to his home town, is tediously long (1,266 pages), bristles with crudities, overemphasizes sex, and is in general a fictional disaster. Jones was accused of being a one-shot performer; he could recount his army experiences, but little more.

These charges were strengthened by his next work, *The Pistol* (1959), which was slightly better received by most critics. Jones, some reviewers suggested, was once again in his milieu—he was now talking about his army, albeit in a symbolic manner. Pfc. Richard Mast is accidentally allowed to retain possession of a .45-caliber pistol, traditionally the sidearm of officers, MP's, or enlisted men on special duty. Throughout the ensuing campaigns he clings tenaciously to his .45. It provides him with protection and, more importantly, symbolized Mast's individualism in a world that demands conformity. The M-1, his regularly issued weapon, is Mast's defense against the Japanese; the pistol is his sidearm against the depersonalizing influences of the army. Orville Prescott, writing in 1959, stated, ". . . it [*The Pistol*] demonstrates that the narrative gift that made his first novel, *From Here to Eternity*, such a success is an authentic talent capable of surviving the blistering reception of *Some Came Running*, an ordeal few novelists experience."

* * *

Other works followed in the sixties. The second volume of his planned trilogy based on *From Here to Eternity*, *The Thin Red Line* was published in 1962; *Go to the Widow Maker* (1967), which related to Jones' obsession with skin diving, was accorded almost as many brutal reviews as *Some Came Running*. (In it Ron Grant, a successful playwright, is caught up in a life in which he alternates between a domineering older mistress, skin diving, and a most promiscuous young woman, Lucky Videndo—Grant is her 401st "intimate affair"—in an attempt to prove his manhood. Despite its faults, and there are many, the book does stand out for its continuation of Jones' attempt to explain character, and it is a strong example of his sometimes overlooked ability at journalistic reporting. Seldom have the challenges and terrors of deep-sea fishing been so accurately and dramatically described.)

The Ice Cream Headache and Other Stories (1968) included short selections, some of which were previously published in magazines. As in all of his works, most are in some way related to Jones' experiences. Some deal with the pre-war years, others the war, and post-war periods in his life. The majority of the stories in this anthology are enjoyable, substantial, and of a high literary quality.

In the meantime, in order perhaps to escape the critics, Jones was spending much time in a Europe which would provide the stage for his next novel, *The Merry Month of May* (1971). It was while he resided in Paris that the 1968 student/worker revolt broke out. Through the use of a narrator, Jack Hartley, Jones writes about the events that he was eye witness to almost as lucidly as he told of Pearl Harbor in *From Here to Eternity*. This journalistic work is deserving of belated attention from those seeking to understand the nature of the worker/student rebellion of the late sixties.

A Touch of Danger was Jones' next published work. It is a private eye novel in the Spillane tradition; entertaining, but extremely long, it partially justifies the charge of one critic that Jones was always attempting to emulate Hemingway. The next book, *Viet Journal*, is not so entertaining. As one might suspect, it represents an attempt by the aging warrior to become personally involved in that conflict. The result is an excellent reporting of the greatest American tragedy since the Civil War.

World War II (1975), inspired by former *Yank Magazine* editor Art Weithas' desire to publish some of the splendid art works deposited in many government archives, provided a new outlet for Jones' energies. He happily agreed to provide the commentary in spite of the fact that his personal experiences were restricted to the Pacific Theater of Operation. However, Jones had worked on the script for Darryl Zanuck's production of Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day* and felt equipped to handle the assignment. The end result was a book that is admittedly not well balanced. Much more attention was paid to the Pacific conflict than the campaigns in Western Europe and Russia, but despite this shortcoming, Jones' sensitive observations on war have universal meaning for readers.

It was during this period that Jones began to suffer the chain of heart attacks leading to his death. One can sense in his conversations and writings a quiet desperation to finish the work begun with *From Here to Eternity*. *The Thin Red Line* was completed, but a mad race against the old adversary death had to be won before the final book in his trilogy, *Whistle*, would know print.

3.

From the time he conceived the idea of *From Here to Eternity*, Jones intended to take the story through World War II. In an introductory note to *Whistle (xix)* he recalls, "When I was beginning *From Here to Eternity*, then still untitled, I meant for that book to carry its people from the peacetime army on through Guadalcanal and New Georgia, to the return of the wounded to the United States. A time span corresponding to my own experience. But long before I reached the middle of it I realized such an ambitious scope of such dimension wasn't practicable. Neither the dramatic necessities of the novel itself, nor the amount of sheer space required would allow such a plan.

"The idea of a trilogy occurred to me then . . . So when I began *The Thin Red Line* (some eleven years later) the plan for a trilogy was already there."

By the time *The Thin Red Line* was published, the critics were poised to find the faults so commonly attributed to Jones in the works already discussed above. As Maxwell Geismar noted in a New York *Times* review in 1962, "This new novel is going to be attacked and abused for its blunt language, its physical 'vulgarity,' its unrelenting naturalism, its 'low-view' of human behavior." In addition, Geismar might have added, Jones was to be further attacked for his "atrocious English" and "immaturity" as well as his inability to perceive any form of existence beyond the army, and his consequent stultified reliance on army experiences for any success he might have.

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In *The Thin Red Line,* the *From Here to Eternity* characters have new names but retain the same personalities and the same values. First Sergeant Warden becomes First Sergeant Welch; Prewitt is now Witt; and Stark is called Storm. The beginning of the book includes one of Jones' more gruesome scenes, the sort of brutal encounter for which he was so often criticized. The rifle company to which his characters belong lands on a beach at Guadalcanal and comes upon a Japanese burial ground. One of the men, the strongest, pulls on a limb sticking out of the shallow grave and lifts it out "looking for souvenirs." The filth and stench beneath the surface are thus revealed, and are symbolic of what lies ahead. As the men run from the horrible smell of the grave, all thoughts of souvenirs are forgotten. (By 1962 readers were better prepared to accept such a cruelly realistic description of the horrors of war, having already encountered tales of the atrocities committed at *Baby Yar* and other Nazi slaughter pens during World War II.)

Literally hundreds of episodes covering the Guadalcanal campaign are included in the 495 pages of *The Thin Red Line.* What emerges is what Jones was clearly a master at achieving. He was able to describe how a war is run on paper by generals, and then, in a most vivid manner, show how such planning or misplanning affects the common soldier. A suggestion toward the end of a campaign that victory over the starved and disease-ridden Japanese "is assured" means simply that Company C must once again undergo the dehumanizing program of killing and being killed.

Witt/Prewitt, the central figure, is a tower of strength and dedication to his company despite his hatred of its commanding officers; Welch/Warden remains the personification of the regular army military man at his *best;* and Storm/Stark relieves his guilt over being a cook, rather than a rifleman, by feeding and giving comfort to any who wander into his field kitchen. The result is a grim and sickening story that is difficult to understand or accept—but so was the war that Jones described in all of its horror.

4.

Whistle was published in 1978. Welch is now Winch; Witt becomes Prell; Storm is Strange, and a new, unusually sane person, Landers, a recent replacement, emerges as a central character. However, because of his continued association with the "old army" figures, Landers is doomed to the same extinction as the others in the trilogy. Prell continues to play the more important role in the book. All have experienced combat in the Pacific, and are returning to the states for the treatment of wounds, psychological illnesses, and, in the case of Winch, relief from a congestive heart condition (the cause of Jones' death). They are carried by ship and train to a hospital in the fictional city of Luxor, a town in the south with the combined features of Nashville and Memphis.

The work was incomplete at the time of Jones' fatal attack, though he spent from twelve to fourteen hours each day in his attic office on Long Island until shortly before his death, in a race with time. Had Jones lived one more month the work would have been completed; he actually finished all but two and one-half chapters before he died on May 19, 1977.

During the last decade of his life Jones had developed a friendship with Willie Morris, former editor of *Harper's* and an author in his own right. Despite the fact they were fifteen years apart, Jones and Morris ". . . were united by a love of books, the South, drink, pranks, history, rural life, storytelling; by a sense of what counts and what doesn't." Moreover, Morris could understand the injury done to Jones by the critics, having experienced his share of harsh reviews in a relatively short literary career. It was to him that Jones entrusted his manuscript before his death.

In his introductory note, Morris suggests that Jones left behind essentially a complete book. "I have put down in considerable detail his [Jones'] intentions for the concluding two and a half chapters. Nothing has been included that he did not expressly wish for these chapters."

Whistle, even more than the prior two novels in the trilogy, develops the essence of Jones' message—how, for one thing, the individual citizen as part of the military can be molded and shaped to adhere to the army's way. In the end, in keeping with Jones' design, all of the doomed characters assume the sameness of manner that is indicative of loss of individuality. Prell, Congressional Medal of Honor winner, is a victim of a tavern brawl while peddling war bonds; Landers, by now one of them, is killed by an automobile; Winch, suffering from many pains both physical and mental, ends up in a padded cell after blowing

Books by James Jones

From Here to Eternity, Scribner's, New York, 1951.
Some Came Running, Scribner's, New York, 1957.
The Pistol, Scribner's, New York, 1959.
The Thin Red Line, Scribner's, New York, 1962.
Go to the Widow Maker, Delacorte, New York, 1967.
The Ice Cream Headache and Other Stories, Delacorte, New York, 1968.
The Merry Month of May, Delacorte, New York, 1971.
A Touch of Danger, Doubleday, New York, 1973.
Viet Journal, Delacorte, New York, 1974.
World War II, Grosset and Dunlap, New York, 1975.
Whistle, Delacorte, New York, 1978.

Recommended Readings about Jones

Hopkins, John R., *James Jones: A Checklist,* Gale Research Company, Detroit, 1974.

Morris, Willie, *A Friendship: Remembering James Jones* (Atlantic Monthly, June, 1978), pp. 47-64.

Morris, Willie, *James Jones: a Friendship,* Doubleday, New York, 1978.

The author wishes to express his thanks to the reviewers whose comments are included in this essay-review: J. Donald Adams, John W. Aldridge, Martin Blumenson, Maxwell Geismar, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, Tim O'Brien, Orville Prescott, and John Thompson.

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up a juke box and the PX in which it was located because he hated the continued playing of the same songs (*I'll Be Seeing You* and *The White Cliffs of Dover*, for example).

Strange is still alive and continues to be obsessed with guilt because he has never served in a combat role. Seized with a feeling of hopelessness, and not wanting to see men once again maimed and killed, he quietly slips into the Atlantic from a troop ship en route to the European Theater of Operation in 1944. There follows a memorable passage describing Strange's [and Jones'] sense of frustration, utter loss, outrage, guilt, loneliness, and final resignation. The book ends abruptly: "He did not know whether he would drown first or freeze." Strange was dead—and so was Jones.

No greater tribute to Jones' reputation as spokesman for the enlisted man occurred than at his funeral. Master Sergeant Patrick P. Mastroleo, a bugler who remembered Montgomery Clift playing taps in *From Here to Eternity*, volunteered to act as bugler at the services for Jones. Morris recalls that Mastroleo was described as "the best damn bugler in the army." As Jones' ashes were being placed in the ground, the Sergeant proceeded to play taps—as loud and clear as Prewitt had at Schofield Barracks so many years before.

5.

There is some truth in the argument that Jones was no purist in his employment of the English language. Other writers, in particular southern authors like Caldwell, Faulkner, and Wolfe, have been subjected to similar charges by critics who more often resemble terriers nipping at the heels of their betters than objective analysts of the contemporary literary scene. But as a veteran of ten years of service in the army, including eight years on active duty, and as an historian who has closely studied the military for thirty-five years, I am unable to credit the accusations that his use of "gutter language" and overreliance on his military experiences are signs of a lack of literary ability.

Both in combat and in army training areas, four letter words were as much a part of standard operating procedure as was waiting in line for everything from performing one's necessaries to obtaining one's mail. I recall seldom receiving a verbal order from a non-com that was not preceded, or followed, by an obscenity. One became so accustomed to *profane* language as *meaningful* language from the very first day of basic training, that one was inclined to accept or to use obscenities when one wanted results. The more serious a situation requiring expeditious action, the more potent the flow of expletives.

Finally, there remains the question of Jones' overreliance on his military experiences as material for his books. There are those who can write about the devastating effects of war without experiencing combat. Stephen Crane did so when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) before witnessing the Graeco-Turkish and Spanish-American wars as a reporter. Crane, however, was an exception. Thucydides, author of *The Peloponnesian War*, fought in that internecine conflict; Polybius observed the capture of Numantia while authoring his famous *Histories;* Caesar knew the armies he described in *De Bello Gallico;* Tolstoy experienced combat in the Crimea before he produced *War and Peace;* and both Romains and Remarque were close enough to the scenes of The Great War to understand how that holocaust destroyed a world of relative stability and ushered in the age of conflict. Most assuredly it is this factor that makes Jones' trilogy more meaningful than many other works published on World War II. Jones was a participant in one of the bloodiest campaigns of that war, who had the prerequisite for reporting in an accurate and dramatic manner what he saw and experienced. Jones was sensitive; he had the eye of a journalist, and could capture in fictional form the realities of what happened to those forced to endure the hell of modern warfare.

Thus, when it comes to the matter of overemphasis on his military experiences, perhaps the critics ought simply to accept Jones for what he was: our greatest interpreter of the meaning of military service and war in the life of the individual combat soldier, before and during World War II. I am quite certain the late and distinguished head editor with the house of Scribner's, Maxwell Perkins, who first recognized Jones' genius and gave him a $500 option in 1947 to write *From Here to Eternity*, would agree. *–Alvin Sunseri*

"Buffalo Chic" Lit

Thunder-Root, by J. Ivaloo Volborth. Native American Series Pamphlet No. 3, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, edited by Kenneth Lincoln, illustrations by Daniel Owen Stolpe. By subscription.

My Horse and a Jukebox, by Barney Bush. Native American Series Pamphlet No. 4, American Indian Studies Center, UCLA, edited by Kenneth Lincoln, illustrations by Richard Summers. By subscription.

Death Dances: Two Novellas on North American Indians ("Wink of Eternity," by John Marvin, and "The Axing of Leo White Hat," by Raymond Abbott). Apple-wood Press. $3.95.

These books by and about contemporary Native Americans bring into focus some of the issues common to the type—assuming there is a category of literature critically distinguishable as Native American, as "Indian." Buffalo Chip Lit. is what a friend, a flamboyant fellow into things "popular," calls it. Buffalo "Chic" Lit. might be a more appropriate designation—at least in the pop lit circles of the Western (which often includes Indian stuff), Science Fiction, and Mystery. With so many Native American Studies courses and programs around the country; with Modern Language Association sections on Native American literature; with new awareness of "ethnic" writers—with all of this and more, contemporary Native American literature does seem to be flowering.

Even so, some fastidious folks stay as far away as possible from the written equivalents of red-man hype—what they often shrewdly distinguish as trivial turquoise (fake) trinkets, cheap copper (green skin variety) curios, all pawned off, ripped off, as authentic products of the American "saga." Thus, telling the

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replica from the real is of special significance when reading—or not reading—Native American literature.

There are other issues, other problems, besides authenticity. Quality, of course. Quality is always a question, but it takes on really bothersome dimensions here. Good writing is good writing whether it be about Indians or about non-Indians. Sure. But insofar as quality is a function of audience and insofar as Indians and non-Indians have different assumptions, different tastes, well . . . there's another rub! (Still number one on reservation reading lists, reportedly, is Dan Cushman's *Stay Away Joe* [1968]. What to make of that in terms of quality, authenticity, or whatever?) Moreover, written "contemporary" Native American literature is, as it were, just the tip of the tipi. We remember, too, that there's a whole tradition of song and ceremony (past and present) embracing myth, medicine, and no telling what else—beyond the ken of the presumption called "American Literature" as ordinarily meant by white, establishment academics and publishers. Then there's the bogey of propaganda intruding on art, or not intruding; all the difficulties that surround oral literatures; the problems of translation of native languages into English. Talk about various possible approaches to literature—mimetic, expressive, pragmatic, formalistic, whatever—when it comes to responding to Native American literature, new and old, eclectic shock can turn a reader into a twitch of choice.

* * *

Judith Volborth's *Thunder-Root* and Barney Bush's *My Horse and a Jukebox*, numbers 3 and 4, respectively, in UCLA's Native American Series, are two poetry pamphlets that evidence both authenticity and quality. Kenneth Lincoln's introductory essays are superb on their own terms and lead the reader into the lyric and imagistic worlds of Indian memory and dream—worlds centered in both loneliness and community; in individuals trying to connect themselves through reverie, song, and conversation with heritage, place, and self. Somewhat paradoxically, both Volborth and Bush are at once essentially and incidentally Indian—allowing the reader to view them as poets and as Native Americans.

Of Apache/Comanche descent, Volborth grew up in New York, a long way from older "tribal" experiences. As the title of her collection of poems suggests, her verse represents, among other things, her search for thunder and roots, for her Native American affinities with earth and sky, for her choral link with the clan voices of coyote and otter, beetle, turtle, louse, and bear—the whole volume representing, in effect, a vision of self, a quest for identity. In its affirmation of self and heritage, Volborth's journey is bittersweet, richly imagistic, and beautiful—accomplished via relatively few and very brief poems as powerful in their silences as in their sounds.

Beginning with seven "Night Songs" and ten "Coyote Dreams"; progressing through fifteen haiku-like "Vihio Images"; complemented by another fifteen poems of "Native Winter," only fifty-one pages in all, the journey—at least for this reader—is ended too soon. The consolation is that by the volume's end Volborth has caught up with her yearnings, has bridled and ridden those "abalone horses" of her night's envisioning: "circling,/ circling . . . on the Moon's rim."

Part of Volborth's poetic soul journey is fun. Masking herself as that wry, ubiquitous trickster, Coyote, Volborth travels humorously in conversation with the priest figure, Black-Coat:

> "You Know," Black-Coat went on,
> "Our Shepard loves all lambs."
> "Yes, but does he love Coyotes?"
> "Why of course, Our Shepard loves all."
> Black-Coat exclaimed,
> "Why Our Shepard can even save *you*."
> "Save me," Coyote laughed,
> "Save me from what,
> a flock of sheep?"

The debate, such as it is, is sealed. The older, irreverently reverent, leaner ways win out with a sparkling eye, tossing head, smooth tongue. "Yipyip-Eeeeooowww!," yelps Coyote-Volborth as "Molten Moon/ drips down into the pine needles./ Coyote tracks embers/all along the embankment."

And part of the trip takes us through a main imagistic current of modern poetry complete with shades of the Pound/Stevens/ Williams tribe—a Native American bestiary:

> Three pausing Blackbirds
> become invisible
> as it begins to snow.
> *
> Foaming at the mouth
> growling, pausing,
> the mad dog
> faces the shotgun.
> *
> Enameled eyes stare
> between the crevice of rock.
> A rattle sounds.
> *
> Blown from bending branch,
> spiders leave their strings behind;
> music of the mouth-bow.
> *
> On the lake lunar rings
> flow and ebb
> about the Loon's cry.
> *
> Sewn inside a seal-skin boot,
> an amulet of power;
> walrus scrotum.

Strong medicine these words. Poet as healer. Of singer and listener.

What James Welch terms "winter in the blood" is felt by Volborth too. Her "Native Winter" is one of regrets, losses, and emptiness; of grotesque massacres like Sand Creek: "Women raped, scalped,/set aflame, disembowled for tobacco pouches./ And the heavy, full breasts of Mothers/ burst open by molten lead."; of evil Goat-woman conjuration: "Into the fire/ she flings the tongues/ of toads,/ spits at the Moon . . ."; of dislocations, "Far from Mescal Mountain/standing in rubber and canvas moccasins"; a dispirited winter where the thump of tires is the only drum and flashing neon lights the only prophecy. But like Carol Lee Sanchez, another "Message Bringer Woman," Judith Volborth "seeds out skeletal words," and promises a sustaining vision-quest in the very calling, in the very going.

Barney Bush is very much a traveller too, a roamer on a soulful journey along the more literal roads of Middle and Southwestern America. In the thirty-odd poems which comprise *My Horse and a Jukebox* he "rides" light and free, from pow-wow gatherings of his people, whatever the tribe, to bars and cafes, through the open spaces of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Oklahoma, and remote northern New Mexico. Enjoying the hunt. Going. Singing. Listening. This is his way: horse, jukebox, road, city, nowhere, every-

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where. Something of a Coyote Kerouac, Bush sings of friends and loves, greetings and goodbyes. Everything pulsing in his own heart's core. Although very much a loner and free spirit, this Shawnee-Cayuga writes from a pan-Indian stance, calling for brotherhood and community; people with people and with place.

Memories and longings, nostalgic reveries of past times, people, and places, mean much to Bush. Rememberings appear, dream-like, in poem after poem. By means of prologue he first remembers, he knows the center of his world, his birth, his place amidst "the whirling water/and the sunlight," part of a local but wide expanse of nature where pine tufts broom the November sky. In such a "house of sky" there are memories of uncles, of grandfather, of early morning departures into the hills, into life; youth into maturity. Alone. There are melancholy lamentations, pleasurable pains, changing seasons of romance, of the heart:

Knowing you
  has been much
like the feeling
of fall when
  geese settle
in picked over cornfields
Grandfather and I
  go to watch them—
  Sensing the time
  is right
  one clear morning
they lift up
  amidst confusion
  up above flaming
  orange hills into
the order of things
and are gone
Always the next
  morning is covered
  by grey rainy skies
  and November wind
Getting over you
  has been much the
Same.

Along Bush's trail of tears there are moments of deep despair and anger; isolation on deserted, windswept city streets; bars closed; blinking yellow lights casting their "great shadow" on the urban Indian usurped of his sheltering mountains and forests. There is sorrow for suicides; young souls who have only battled the bottle; warriors who can talk only of olden times and traditions never lived. "The order of things" gone awry!

Interspersed with the pain and anger are Bush's simple pleasures. The sheer relish and appreciation of simple sensation—austerely communicated: "fresh washed hair/ in mountain water . . . sun coming up/ clear New Mexico sky/ warm piñon fire." And humor. Satirical and rebellious:

People would ask you
  what kind of Indian
  you were
  and you always said,
"I'm a damn 'Alabamu
  Couchatto' "
And Jesus, would I laugh

Indian stereotypes can even be "enjoyed," the parody parodied in the right circumstances. For example, portraying himself, his persona, as "Indian boy in a cowboy hat," Bush can playfully but poignantly protect "with his life" his gift hat, his treasured symbol of friendship with an Indian buddy, while hitch-hiking near Waterloo, riding in a station wagon full of kids and packages on a lonely Christmas day in the "heart of honkie/redneck country":

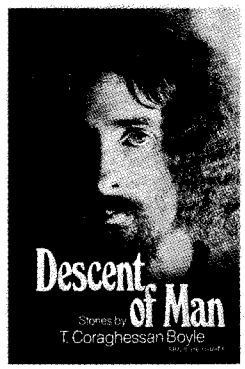
  in the corner
of my eye caught
two boys both
  fighting to wear
  my hat—Damn!
Reached for it got
aimed at by pop
  guns—saved by
  the daddy
"Put that hat
back! He'll
  scalp you."
Caught them
sneaking aims
at me all the
  way to Route 13

Quite simply, Barney Bush is a young American poet who, like Volborth, achieves much and promises more. To be sure, Bush's "Indianness" is very much heard, but as part of outright good poetry, pleasing (albeit sad and lonesome) words and rhythms.

Of the two novellas in *Death Dances,* Raymond Abbott's "The Axing of Leo White Hat" comes close to UCLA's Native American Series in quality and authenticity, in good writing, and in offering a credible rendering of Indian—at least down-trodden Indian—ambience. Abbott lived on a Sioux reservation (the book's bio-

June report on

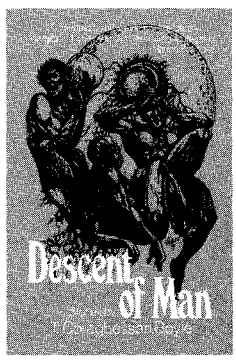
ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS BOOKS



Seldom have we argued among ourselves as vigorously as we did over the right book jacket to put on **DESCENT OF MAN** by **T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE.** Usually we settle arguments with a compromise. But instead, we used two jackets. The front (below) features **DESCENT OF MAN.** The back (above) features the author himself.

Result? Extravagant praise, both for a writer whom *Atlantic* readers will remember by "The Champ" and "John Barleycorn Lives," and for his book. Exclamations from the *Saturday Review* ("A writer to savor and to watch"); from the New York *Times Book Review,* where Max Apple wrote: "A joyful announcement: an adventurous new bird, T. Coraghessan Boyle, has come to roost in the literary jungle"; from Elaine Kendall in the Los Angeles *Times Book Review:* "*Descent of Man* often seems to be an anthology of the prize-winning stories of the '70s instead of the work of only one person."

Whatever you are looking for, enthralling stories or an exciting new author, you will find it in this book. Pick your jacket.



DESCENT OF MAN
by T. Coraghessan Boyle
$9.95 at your bookstore
LITTLE, BROWN

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graphical blurb doesn't say which one) in South Dakota in the mid-'60s and experiences there ostensibly provide the basis for a tragically realistic narrative of alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, and passive rape; of violent murder, self-slaughter, and guilt by association.

Here's a scapegoat tale of the essentially motiveless (maybe blameless?) murder of old Leo White Hat by Ben Whipple, a giant half-breed with an unquenchable appetite for liquor, cruelty, and women in, appropriately enough, Cut Meat—an "off-reservation," absurdist, Dakota town of debauchery and death. The story opens with the axing of White Hat; entails a night's journey of desultory escape and chase in Harry Shot's speeding, people-crowded, bar-hopping car; and ends in an early morning head-on crash with a pick-up truck. Result: ten dead Indians—including Whipple and three children in the back of the truck. Few are left to hear the Catholic priest's, Father Keel's, funeral sermon on survival and responsibility. Ironically, young "innocent" Tuffy Bordeaux is arrested as White Hat's murderer, the one to blame. Clearly author Abbott is pointing the finger at a wider number of culprits, perhaps even the reader; for sure, he points at a political and social system which for years has euphemistically both nourished and ignored the Indian "problem." The crime and the motive, the "escape" and the guilt involve much more than the axing of one old man, one Leo White Hat.

Sound overly didactic and melodramatic? It isn't, really. With considerable talent Abbott understates the descriptions and events with an objectified, journalistic style that heightens the impact of carnage and waste. One senses that there are levels of human feeling and tragedy here that no one, not even the benumbed, stupored personages involved, really know—really care about. Combining the distancing of reportorial "facts" and highway toll statistics with an indirectly acquainted, limited third-person point of view, Abbott's "fiction" obliquely but compellingly asks the reader to "protest" the dehumanized, pathetic conditions witnessed in such a fictively real place as Cut Meat, U.S.A.

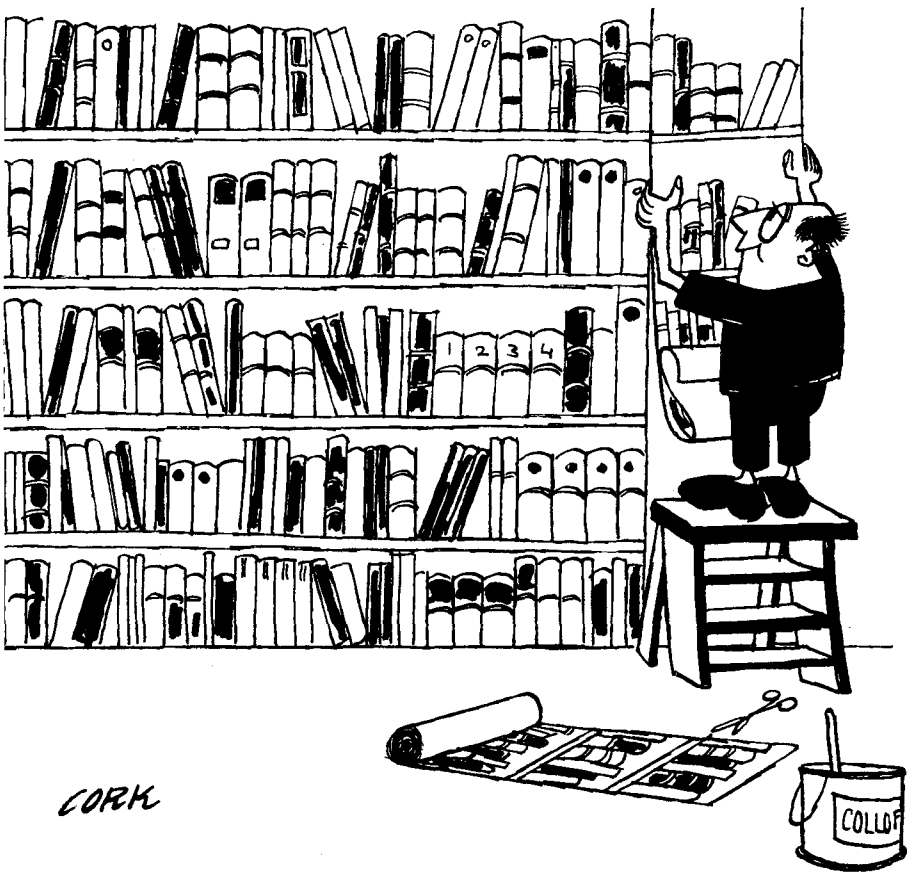
The lesser of the works under review, at least the one which tends to read more like inadvertent parody of what one might think of as Indian literature, is John Marvin's "Wink of Eternity." It may just be a matter of mode—of romance rather than realism; of fantasy and fabulation about superstition; of stylized Geronimo Gothic—which prompts such a response. A matter of reader taste. A matter of preferring *believable* make-believe.

Marvin seems serious enough in what he is doing, writing this mystery about Mexican medicine men. The story deals with a modern M.D., Dr. Ramon Diaz, in mortal combat with a Shaman, malevolent Maguel of the Tarahumarae tribe in Western Chihuahua, and his ancient remedies and incantations. Science vs. Curanderismo. Typhoid must be stopped. The source of the pestilence found to avoid the eradication of an entire village, the last remnants of an isolated tribe. Doppelgängers must join in the death dance. There's knifing at night—mysteriously staged by malevolent Maguel. There's full breasted Rosalina, the peasant girl, who in all her "lubricious innocence" is willing to play doctor: "She laughed briefly, in a deep-throated way. 'Would you like to see me whole? As you do with the patients?' " (Move over Linda Lovelace?) There's flashy bi-lingualism (e.g., "Not absolutamente"), and fancy—if ungrammatical—clinical jargon (e.g., "A pale ectomorph with stringy hair, her gaze followed him up the street.").

The trouble is that, like reading Poe or watching the Lone Ranger and Tonto in action, you find yourself chuckling (at least some sensibilities do) when you know you shouldn't. Could the "wink" in the title be at us? Reading "A Wink of Eternity" is perversely fun. And it's a tragedy! Quality kitsch?

Certainly there is a thematic parallel, a common motif of death, in both "The Axing of Leo White Hat" and "Wink of Eternity." Apple-wood press would have been better advised, however, to print these two companion novellas separately—if for no other reason than to avoid invidious comparison. Nevertheless, all of these publications help confirm, in content and in format, that contemporary Native American literature has in some cases arrived and in others is close to coming into an identity, an essence of its own—Buffalo Chip and Buffalo Chic notwithstanding.

— Robert Gish



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RITES OF SPRING

And the Mechanics of Art and Beauty

1.

The Academy Awards are a ritual. It is the most *spectacular* television SPECTACULAR! It includes something for everybody and (hopefully) nothing offensive. It has lots of T & A. It is the quintessential talking head show, this year interlarded with more film clips than ever—*and* disco Donna Summers (microphone covered to match her sequined dress) and Steve Lawrence and Sammy Davis, Jr., and (star of stars) John Wayne (who looks thin and sounds tremulous).

* * *

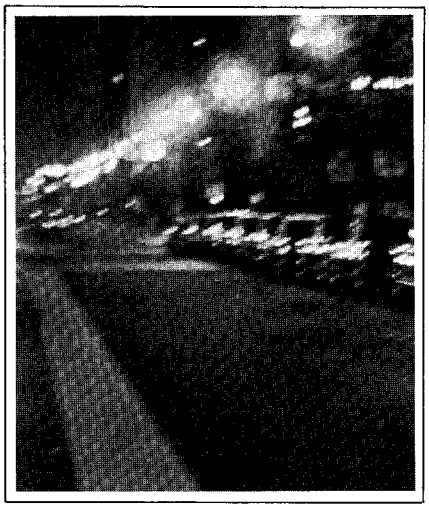
The day after, "Coming Home" (with both best actors, Jane and Jon, and best screenplay) opens in 12 theatres in the Bay Area. Ms. Fonda said, the night before, she thought they ought to have got the best picture too.

* * *

Expectations of a "Deer Hunter" sweep are reinforced by its first award: Christopher Walken as best supporting actor. A nominee he beat is one-time stuntman Richard Farnsworth, who played the generic *western* side-kick in, and was part of the best part of the picture "Comes a Horseman."

* * *

It's a garish set, at first sight, somehow religious, with glittering stands of what look like organ pipes to either side. And, fixed to them, graceful curved flights of stairs for the star presenters to descend. (Of course! I just got it. Gods always descend from heaven. This is a church.) On top, somehow—a sort of flying stage—is the orchestra, called "The Orchestra" and 100 strong. And to the side too, towers of what look like plaques; they swivel out appropriately and become screens for film clips to play on.



* * *

The scientific and technical awards which mean nothing outside the industry, and maybe not much more to some of the stars of the night: to Kodak for a color duplicating film, probably of less grain build-up and color saturation, for the making of more and better prints—the two or three hundred or more to show in the theatres, all of which come from one original camera negative stock; to the man, Stefan Kudelski, who invented the recorder now used (probably) exclusively in recording lip-synch sound in production, the Nagra; to Panavision for the "Panaflex" camera which is now, probably, the preferred choice in motion picture production cameras, supplanting the Mitchell, a version of whose original model was almost the exclusive studio camera since its inception in the dawn of the industry.

* * *

The second "Deer Hunter" award: editing (the editor says later if he'd had *final cut* he would have trimmed the wedding scene, and generally cut the whole thing shorter), and the third: sound, follow hard on each other.

* * *

"For the contribution it has made to the public's perception of movies as an art form" the New York Museum of Modern Art Film Department gets an honorary Oscar, and then they show a series of clips from the museum archives. Fascinating, the one in particular, where the explosions of firing pistols are colored red in an otherwise very old black and white western. The use of color goes back a long way. It was accomplished by hand painting each frame on the film. Twenty-four frames per second moving through the gate—that's a lot of very small pictures to color!

* * *

The best original screenplay is "Coming Home." (The three writers don't seem to relate to each other.) The picture is, I think, an excellent realistic movie, the basis for which is usually a good tight script. Realism is what film is purely—an approximation of what's out there—a metaphor.

* * *

That "Days of Heaven" wins for photography is not strange, it's beautiful—perhaps too beautiful. The picture faltered for me because it stopped being a story about people, became a series of conceits, symbolic, pretty, but increasingly abstract.

* * *

Audrey Hepburn presents an Honorary Oscar to King Vidor. The reverence, the romanticism that the industry has for its elders—here at the awards at least.

* * *

It's Francis Ford Coppola and Ali McGraw (an odd couple) who tender the award for best director to Michael

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Cimino for "Deer Hunter." Ah—"Deer Hunter" (which was nominated for 9 and got 5 awards); there are people (including me) who don't like that picture. No, as its claimants say, a movie does not have to stick to literal truth or reality, but once you get into a complex allegory it has to have its own logic and consistency. And if you choose it out of a current perception you run the risk of presenting a biased point of view, or touching that in the audience. Just, for instance, the fact that the picture is solidly visually and literally tied to a particular group in American reality, but the climactic symbolic hunt takes place in symbolic mountains like none near that part of middle America. Sure, I get it, but it's pushing me. The shift bothers, interrupts the flow. For instance, "Deliverance" it seems, was a similarly allegorical film, but the ground (or water) of it was a literal and unified reality. Before announcing his *paisano* the winner, Coppola gives a kind of paean to "communication" and how break-throughs in the immediate future will be mind-boggling. He doesn't say whether it will be before or after Apocalypse—and throughout he keeps scratching fitfully at his beard.

* * *

It is late and we are up to the highlights, the best and brightest. Cary Grant looks to be only a whitened version of his archetypal self, and he presents to Laurence Olivier (and the ovation that went on and on . . .) an honorary award for "the full body of his work, for the unique achievements of his entire career and his lifetime of contribution to the art of film." There's a series of clips from Olivier's performances—fascinating and awe-inspiring—the magnificence of some actors! (Confirmed by his most recent "A Little Romance," directed by George Roy Hill.) Next comes the award for the aforementioned best actors—and finally: John Wayne to present number one, the best picture. Again, to the service of their own monuments, their romantic illusion and slavish search to hold youth, and to his acknowledged great talent (John Wayne always plays a version of *his* own archetype, from the Ringo Kid to J.B. Books—like Spencer Tracy—like the *old* Stars), the applause from the show business audience goes on and on and on. He announces the winner—"Deer Hunter"—and that's the climax. The denouement, with the credits rolling over it, the stage and Wayne smiling his warm flinty crooked smile, shaking hands with all the stars. He's being welcomed home to Hollywood by all the others who are his satellites.

* * *

It is reported subsequently that the Academy Awards is down two to more than five points in the Nielsen rating from last year, the 50th Anniversary Show, which had the highest rating ever.

2.

Of "Singing in the Rain," in *Development of Film,* Alan Casty characterizes its genre as "The Everyday-life Musical," a combination of "gusto and an innocent pleasure in the orchestration of real-life situation into musical fantasy." Arthur Freed at MGM produced it, and Casty goes on to say that Freed's films were the "peak works."

A favorite plot of the musical was backstage machinations to get a musical comedy put on stage, spoofing the often really absurd and hilarious and sometimes cruel process of the magic of theatre and/or film. "Singing in the Rain" (which is about getting a film musical made) is spoofing film, and at one of its historical moments—the wrenching years of transition from the silents to sound. Behind all the slapstick and the magnificent innocent, yet provocative, dancing, is a rather poignant and unashamedly romantic love story that's played straight.

When the picture opens you see the spoof right away. Gene Kelly comes on playing against character—an audience from that time knows immediately the tongue is in the cheek. Seeing it in our time there is a nostalgic wish for the simplicity that this picture represents. (Which didn't exist in the reality of that time either—1952—Father Eisenhower and the Korean War.)

Indulging myself—seeing it on a television screen—I begin to break down the shots in the production number sequences (like Donald O'Connor's "Make Them Laugh"), am amazed at their complexity. It's one thing to shoot drama and a stylistic director, a Hal Ashby, can find some very interesting camera positions to cover a scene. Still, not discounting it, but what is that?—only a couple of people, more or less, in a room. Here a principal dancer and a large chorus work on a complex and intricate set of stages, often in levels, with fully detailed and practical sets as background. Mechanically, that's something else.

And all this covered in long con-

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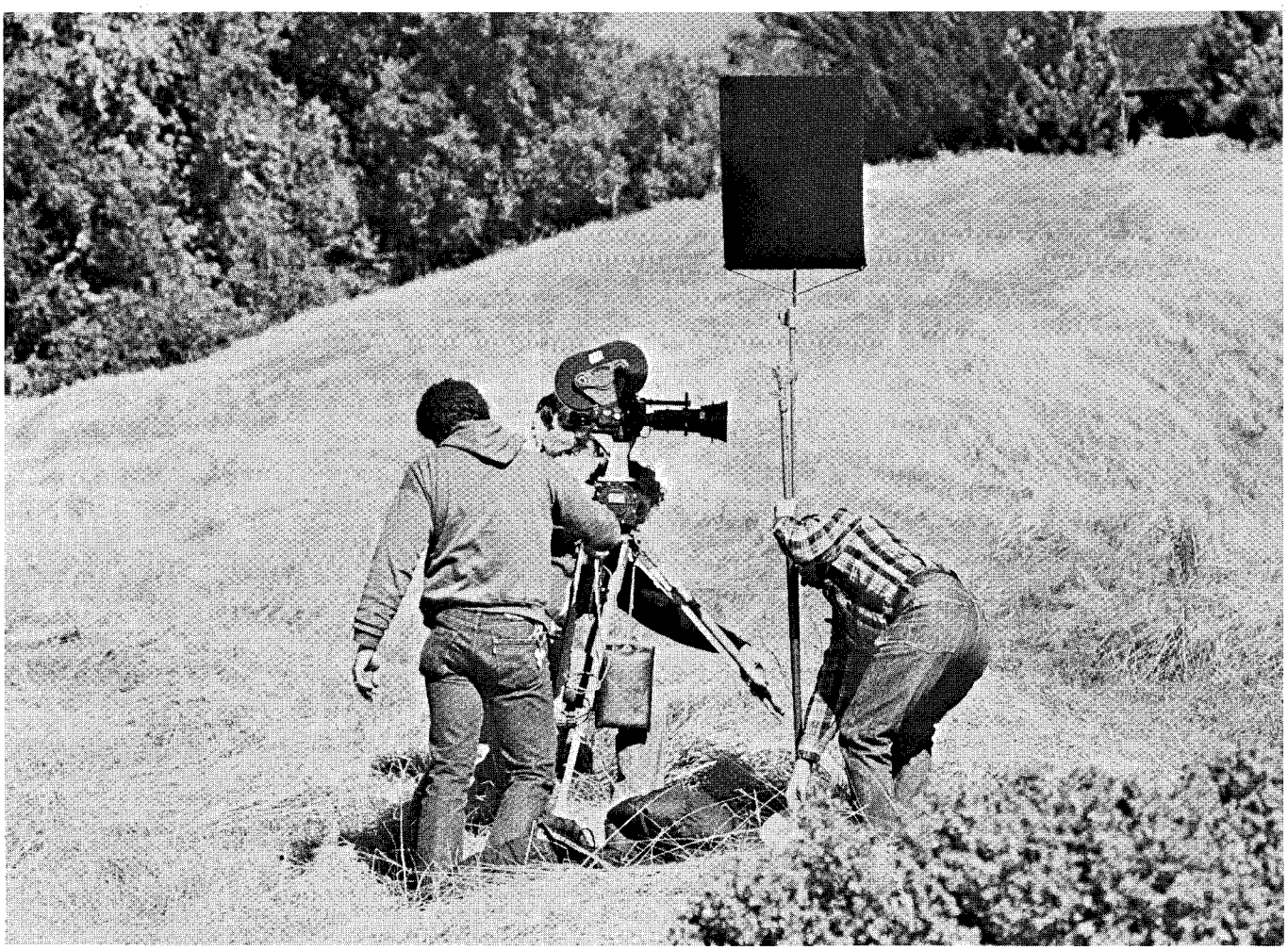

tinuous dolly moves. In those days there were more limitations in the state of the art, you understand; lighting was carefully pre-set, the dancers had to hit marks on the floor (for that lighting), as well as dance. And the focus puller had to be right on—this before the days of generally available through-the-lens viewfinders (reflex) in studio cameras—keeping on the dance while the camera itself moved back and forth and up and down (it was also before Zoom lenses) on the end of a studio movie camera crane. All this meant tedious, exacting work—blocking, rehearsing, and—certainly—a number of takes before it all came together.

And one of these long camera moves will cut into another with no obvious transition. Off it goes again. What about the title dance of "Singing in the Rain"—on top of everything else it was done in a rain effect. It must have taken days to shoot one of those sequences; with the set construction costs, studio overhead, and the big studio crews, they must have been astronomically expensive—even in those cheaper days. But watching "Singing in the Rain" today is marvelous. "The Whiz" or "Hair" don't touch it.

As Casty concludes: "What had given the period of flair and exuberance its tonic note . . . was an airy innocence. For all its romance the musical imagination has been most buoyant and free when touched with the lightness of comedy."

3.

Having seen recently two very good solid and stylish small movies: "Ice Castles" (directed by Donald Wrye, NAR, Summer 1975) and "Voices" (directed by Robert Markowitz), and also—though not so recently—several large disaster, catastrophe, sci-fi epics, I began thinking about significance. According to Brooks and Warren in the classic *Understanding Fiction:*

> Theme is what a piece of fiction stacks up to. It is the idea, the significance, the interpretation of persons and events, the pervasive and unifying view of life which is embodied in the total narrative.

These latter grand extravagances (cost, at least 10 million these years) are a minimal risk to their financiers, are not, according to Jack Egan in a piece in a recent *New York Magazine* article, considered by the studios to be risks at all, provided they deliver something that hooks the audience—terror, horror, special effects, stars, whatever. In their own way each of these has a significance, meaning: importance, but not much consequence. I mean the theme of "Star Wars" is good white-hat guys beat bad black-hat guys, and the sequel has bad guys trying again.

The two smaller pictures (which, according to Egan, represent a significant financial risk even if they cost under 5 million each) have been dubbed in reviews (unfortunately) as tear-jerkers. "The trouble with these people—" (this was one movie journalist referring to other movie journalists after the press screening of "Voices") "—is that they're afraid to admit they *feel*." You remember the classic American pictures of the '30s—there wasn't a dry eye in the house or on the screen.

Sentiment/Sentimentality; I did

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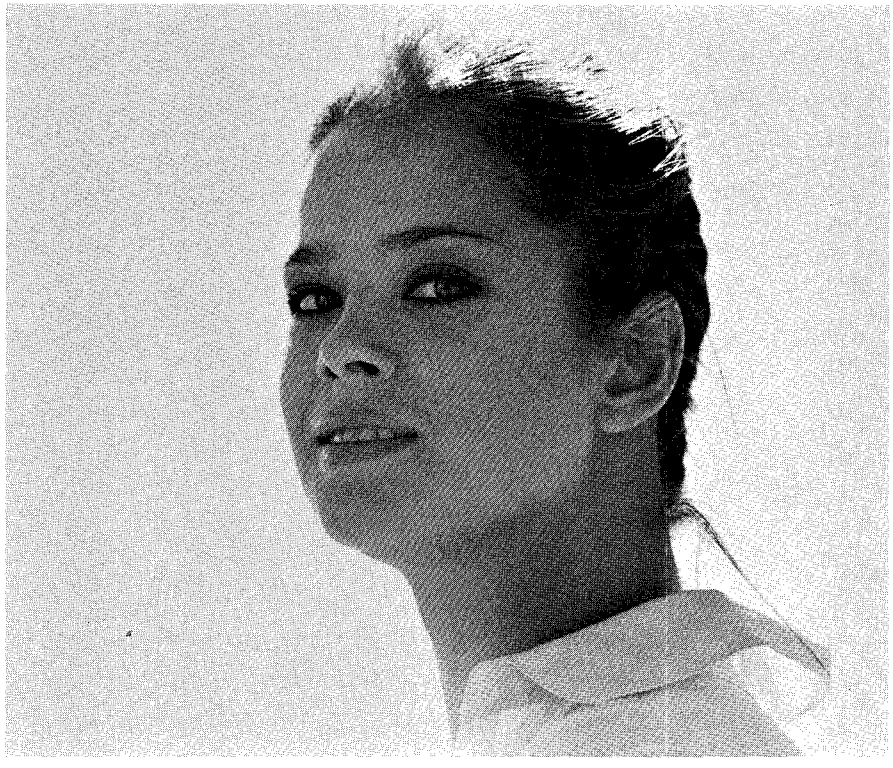
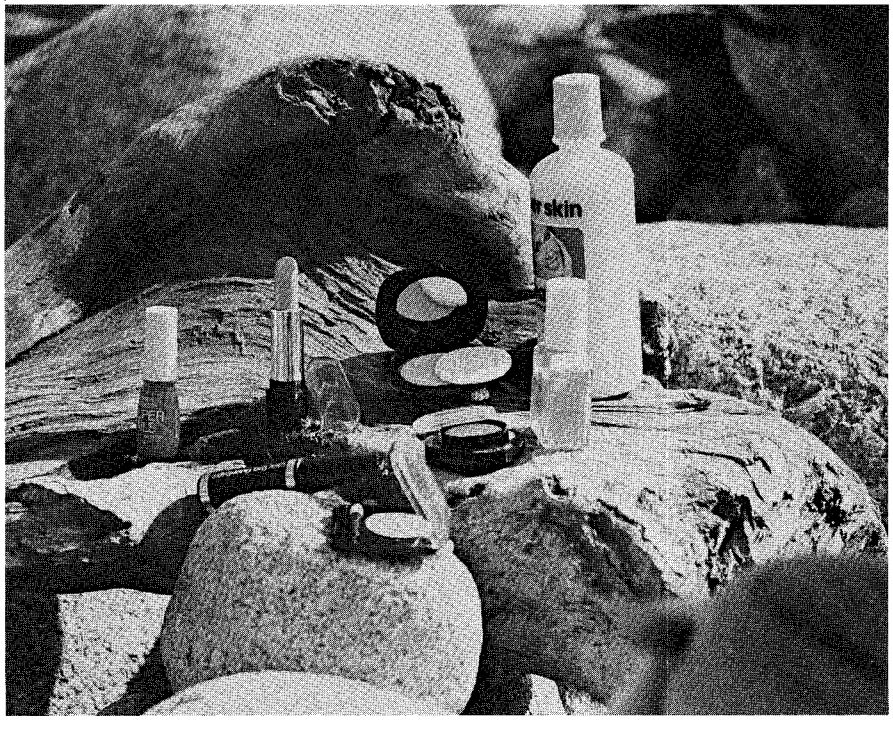


not find the feelings inappropriate; the point is the actions of the plot in both films had to do with people in adversity, living because of it, with significant events (for them), in their significant period of time. These pictures aim to a theme—something complex, adult, like life is. That doesn't have much to do with the target audience the big ones aim at—now the largest group of movie goers (says Egan), according to the statistics—between the ages of 13 and 23.

4.

On the rocks, by the ocean, for two hours the cameraman and acting propman squat over a piece of driftwood. On it they arrange and re-arrange the cosmetic line—making it *just right* for the beauty shot. Tediously exacting a beauty shot is, always, for that's the product, what pays the piper, what all the *mishegas* is about.

I was down along the Big Sur coast once before, working that time on the



shooting of a car commercial. The up-coming new model, the one we photographed, had been hand fabricated. They had it under a cover in the motel parking lot, but drove it openly on the road to locations. That beauty shot was the interior, and for lighting the door was taken off (something plastic cracked and broke), the back seat removed to build a mount for the camera. Two hours—more—to take a picture of the front seat and dashboard—emphasizing the texture of the upholstery, the symmetry of the instrument console.

What the rest of the commercial will show (in the span of 28 total seconds) is driving, sun glinting on the chrome trim, on the stunning coast highway, State Route #1, south of Point Sur lighthouse. We hold up traffic and shoot the hero car from a camera car, going back and forth innumerable times on the same curved stretch of road. Long suffering tourists, released periodically from road blocks manned by a deputy sheriff at either end of the stretch, eye us, the movie company, curiously as they drive by. The glamour of show business!

In the most recent job the beauty shot was the cosmetics line. The piece of driftwood the production assistant bought at the rustic furniture and redwood-burl-table store. Tubes of lipstick, little cases of blush, bottles of skin freshener, eye liner paraphernalia, arranged and rearranged and studied through the finder of the Arri 2-C camera. The location is between Bird Rock and Point Joe, a *vista point* on 17-Mile Drive. Behind it the Pacific Ocean comes in on long curling rollers that foam among the rocks. In the parking area in a motor home, surrounded by her entourage, is the star-model—famous in her world, very young and very sophisticated and very charming, and, of course, very beautiful.

Along the drive beyond the parking area the tourists in their cars pass by. This 17-Mile Drive circles the small peninsula that is the Del Monte Forest, Pebble Beach, California. One is charged to enter it through guarded gates, and past them are 26 points of interest, from vistas of the turbulent sea to public and private golf courses, equestrian fields, the Pebble Beach shops, fantastic private estates in which the people must feel somewhat like animals in a cage—being watched. Signs by the drive-

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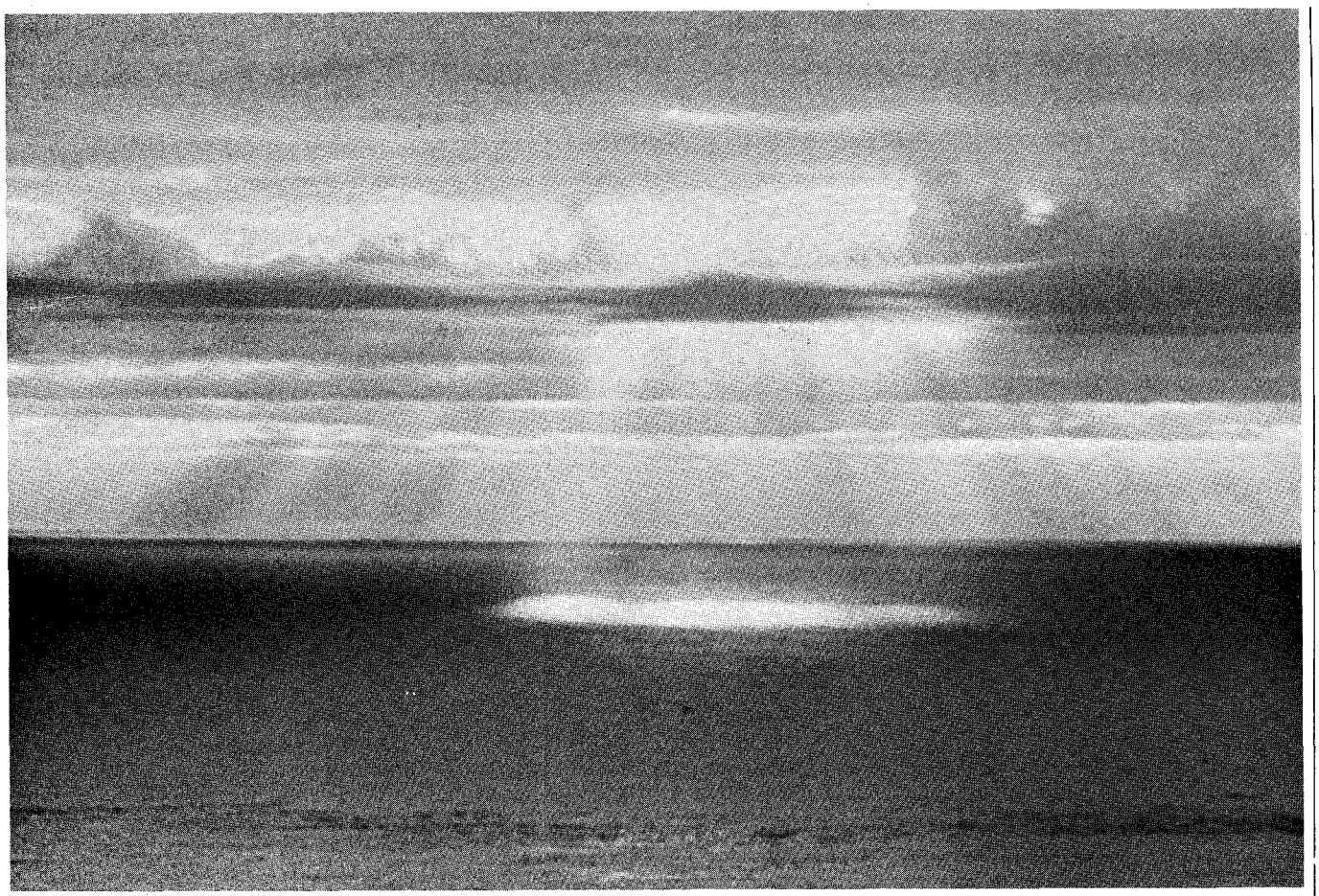

ways or on the gates read: *Keep Out!* It is, in fact, a private community, complete with multimillion dollar real estate, multimillionaires, and places to play golf and polo.

So the production company didn't pay a fat fee to shoot?—you bet they did. And the day at Pebble Beach was only one of three. We did the beauty shot and then the handsome boy who's surf fishing, backlit by the setting sun. We shoot him looking at her, and then her looking at him. The expressions on her face; her sexy hiss.

For two days before that we shot around Big Sur, down the coast. The girl walks on the hills, in different wardrobes, walks again with a little dog. We did another girl-meets-boy. In this one she happens on a handsome backpacker, sitting by a rock, biting an apple. They look at each other, too. There was also the morning of the effects shot on the top of a hill that we schlepped all the gear 500 yards up to. A large sheet of plate glass in a frame is rigged vertically, a black drape suspended over and behind, making a shadow box. From behind the glass the model looks out, and in front the camera photographs her, but also a reflection of the range of hills the glass faces. It should be a stunning visual; in the commercial it will appear she's behind the window of her room—inside which, in the hotel, we shoot in the afternoon.

Wearing a diaphanous and opaque negligee, she wakes in the bed, rises and crosses to the window, looks out. (Where the effect shot will cut in, seeing her and the reflected hills.) Inside, another shot, she's on the window seat, doing the eye-lash thing. The director-cameraman lights her magnificently. He was (still is?) one of the great fashion still photographers. There's another shot and another shot and another shot. Under the robe she's wearing cowboy boots and she ranges from patient to dramatic to petulant.

In the three or four days I am with them—the model and the make-up man, the two from the advertising agency, the director-cameraman and the woman who functioned as producer for the production house, the stock in trade of which are cosmetic commercials—I become aware of The Fashion World. Stories are told at dinner of *this* shooting at *that* exotic location—which could literally be any place in the world. Names of celebrities and jet-setters are bandied back and forth. There's talk of famous models and how the stunning locations were found, for both are generic to these commercials. People live in Europe and commute to jobs in Marrakech or Palm Springs, piloting their own planes. This group has been together a long time, and there's a recurrent long-running joke about a fantasy movie they will someday make, "Nude Cuties on Skis."

Of other star models some stories are related with a touch of malice—the one who won't touch the product—the one who always has a zit. The one with us, 21 going on 35 in sophistication: by turns she's winsome, childish, pouting, naïve, and the ultra-courtesan. If you've noticed, in these commercials hissing is very big these days; at dinner she hisses to show us how it's done. She refuses to talk about herself, and how she was discovered, but not talking is sometimes as eloquent as talking. I muse about it: was she discovered in a Paris discotheque? Walking along the waterfront in Hamburg? Or some place mundane, like a beauty school?

It doesn't matter, as she really doesn't matter either. What *does* is her representation, either in print ads or on television, and even that is only a metaphor for the mascara on a tiny brush, selling *it* to the whole world.

— Lawrence Sturhahn

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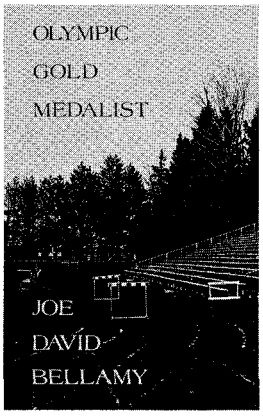

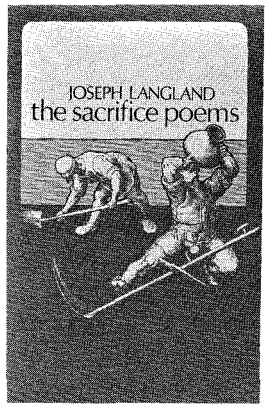

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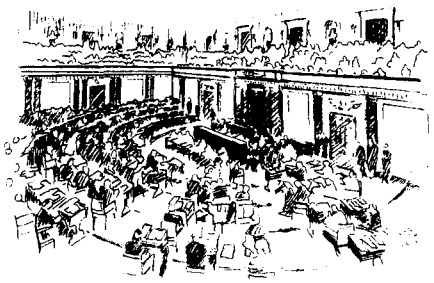

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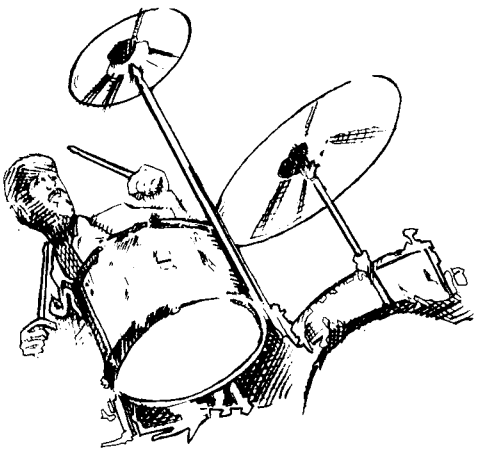

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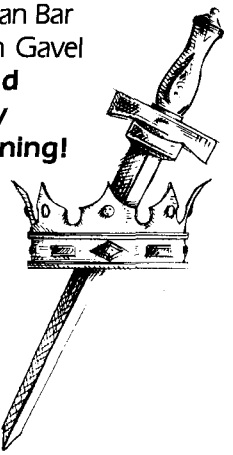

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